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FRANCIS BEAUMONT

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

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PREFACE.

THE following essay is, so far as I am aware, the first systematic attempt to separate Beaumont and Fletcher on broad grounds of criticism. This task has been pronounced impossible by some, while by others it has been approached from one side or another; and so far as metrical tests are concerned, it was to a certain extent accomplished by Mr. Fleay in the papers read before the New Shakspere Society in 1876. With these I only became acquainted after my own work had made some progress, and I was glad to find that they afforded independent confirmation of many of my results. I have not been able however to accept all his conclusions; and while by no means inclined to neglect metrical evidence of authorship, which is often both the most valuable as well as the simplest test, I have avoided the statement of it in a statistical form, which may be seriously misleading. In that part of the essay—representing a greater amount of work than any other—which deals with the question of authorship, I have not attempted to set forth

in detail the evidence which leads me to assign each scene to its author; this would need a separate treatise for each play, and would stand seriously in the way of any broad view of the whole: I have desired only to state definitely the conclusions, and to suggest the nature of the evidence by which they were reached, in such a way that it can be easily tested by the critic. Questions of disputed authorship cannot but be wearisome to most readers; but upon the answer to them in this case depends our estimate of one of the most remarkable of Shakspere's contemporaries, whose individuality has for various reasons been hitherto greatly obscured. And this should be a subject of interest to students of English literature. If the work consists more of disentangling criticism than of presentation, that fault is inherent in the subject.

In criticism I have endeavoured to be definite, and to avoid exaggeration. Of Shakspere literature Carlyle said long ago, "Volumes we have seen that were simply one huge interjection, printed over three hundred pages." My aim is not to demand admiration for the subject of this essay, but to help in some small degree to define his position, to illustrate one obscure passage in the most interesting chapter of English literature.

Obligations must be acknowledged first and chiefly to Dyce, the value of whose work on the text of Beaumont and Fletcher can only be fully appreciated by those who, like myself, have had experience of other editions.

"Did the name of criticism ever descend so low as in the hands of those two fools and knaves, Seward and Simpson?" asks Coleridge: and most readers of Beaumont and Fletcher will be disposed to echo the complaint. I am also indebted to Charles Lamb's *Specimens of the Dramatists*,* to Spalding's *Essay on the Authorship of "The Two Noble Kinsmen,"* to Collier's *Annals of the Stage*, to Mr. Fleay's papers for the New Shakspere Society and *Shakespeare Manual*, and to Professor Ward's *History of English Dramatic Literature*. Other obligations will be acknowledged as they occur.

In quotations the text of Dyce has been followed in all essential points, and in dates the modern system has been adopted, assuming the year to begin January 1st; thus March, 1615-16, is written simply March, 1616.

* It may interest some of the many lovers of Charles Lamb, to hear that the copy of Beaumont and Fletcher which belonged to him, and was used in making selections for his *Specimens*, is at present in the British Museum, having been picked up accidentally at a sale a few years ago. It is a copy of the folio of 1679, and contains MS. notes by S. T. Coleridge, chiefly on *The Prophetess*, and an apology for them, signed with his initials. "I cannot read Beaumont and Fletcher but in folio," says Elia; and this evidently must be the identical old folio which was dragged home late on a Saturday night from Barker's in Covent Garden, as related in his essay on *Old China*.

FRANCIS BEAUMONT.

I.

THE mysteriously double personality which passes in literature under the name of "Beaumont and Fletcher" has perhaps had its due share of popular reputation; but it has certainly hitherto had less than its due share of sound criticism. The first of English literary critics asserted, as is well known, that in their own age the popularity of these dramatists upon the stage exceeded Shakspere's; and the latest historian of the English drama counts them as names to which posterity has been inclined to allow almost equal honour with his. "In the Argo of the Elisabethan drama—as it presents itself even now to popular imagination—Shakspere is the commanding figure. Next to him sit the twin literary heroes, Beaumont and Fletcher, vaguely regarded as inseparable in their achievements. The Herculean form of Jonson has a more disputed place among the princes; and the rest are but dimly distinguished."* These statements point

* Ward, *History of the English Drama*, vol. ii. p. 155.

rather to over-estimation than to neglect, and but for the general absence of clear ideas upon the subject which is hinted at by the phrase "vaguely regarded as inseparable," one might almost suppose that it was a needless impertinence to call public attention to them any further. But in fact, whatever may be the popular estimate of these writers (if indeed anything exists which deserves to be called by that name), it seems to rest upon no sound basis of criticism. The duty of the critic in such a case as this is first to ascertain whether the work to which are attached the names of two writers is in fact a homogeneous product or no. If indeed it should appear that in this notable instance two men were found who had such a congenial spirit that they became in truth but a single writer, it would matter little to the critic what share each had in the writings which they jointly put forth; even the retirement of one would make no essential difference in the quality of the subsequent work. But if we have here a partnership like others in that age, or differing only in being more continuous, and formed rather from considerations of private friendship than from the necessity of rapidly supplying the theatre with a play; if, in fact, there was no such wondrous "consimility of fancy" so far as literary production was concerned, however much tastes may have agreed in domestic matters, and if the opinion to the contrary is merely the invention of an uncritical age perpetuated by the indolence of eighteenth-century editors,—then it becomes a question whether any true estimate of the work can be formed which does not distinguish the bent of each

individual genius, and elucidate the several principles of art by which each was instinctively guided in contributing his share to the whole. Without this, it may be that the total result of our criticism will be uncertain. Separate parts may be found perhaps to have a homogeneity resulting from the predominance of one or the other of the two authors in their composition, but the whole collection may seem to be a medley with no distinguishable artistic aim or moral result. Nay, it may even prove that the main defects of each separate work are the result of co-operation, and that success in the highest sense of the word depended chiefly upon the question whether one or the other obtained a strong predominance. For without in any way prejudging the point whether one was distinctly superior in genius to the other, we may at least admit the possibility that the work which was most individual was also the best, and that such criticism as Schlegel's—"They hardly wanted anything but a more profound seriousness of mind, and that sagacity in art which observes a due measure in everything, to deserve a place beside the greatest dramatic poets of all nations," * —is, in part at least, owing to the uncertain sound uttered by their writings when treated as a whole, and to the effect of incongruity produced by two minds in many respects different from one another working upon the same composition. It is possible that the critic may be able to find within the volumes which have "Beaumont

* Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Literature*, lecture xiii. Darley, in the introduction to his edition, speaks of certain of their characters as "not *developed* but reared up like Nebuchadnezzar's image," of materials which do not amalgamate together.

and Fletcher" as their title, not one but two distinct ideals of art, and may see that each is in its turn attained by individual work, and missed, not always indeed where co-operation appears, but where the co-operation was of such a kind that there was not a distinct predominance of one or the other author in the design and execution of the work.

The present essay is partly intended as a contribution towards this groundwork of criticism, and as it necessarily brings into prominence the individual characteristics of the authors with which it deals, and dwells upon the special artistic qualities of their work, it may seem desirable to emphasize also the other claim which these productions have upon us, as manifestations of one great phase of the national life, in the development of which our own country enjoys an acknowledged pre-eminence among the peoples of the world. For as Francis Bacon introduces his work with "Soleo æstimare hoc opus magis pro partu temporis quam ingenii," so we may regard also the work which was being done simultaneously among the people at the *Globe*, and the *Blackfriars*, at the *Fortune*, and the *Bull*, as in a great measure a birth of time, though so brilliantly illuminated by individual genius that we are almost disposed to deny his claim of parentage.

Nor can a sufficient acquaintance with this phase of the national life be attained merely by the study of Shakspere. The extraordinary character of Shakspere's genius makes him not a fair representative of the period to which he belonged: "He was not of an age,

but for all time." And on the other hand, even he must be partly interpreted by his age. We cannot duly appreciate his position without careful study of this whole chapter of literary history. Unless we are acquainted with the soil from which he grew, and with the other products which that soil was capable of bearing, he remains, not marvellous merely, but prodigious. If he be regarded after the fashion of the last generation but one, as a *lusus naturæ*, out of relation to the ordinary laws of human development, he loses his interest for us as a human being; his actual bodily existence, which has little enough of the substance imparted by the biographer, becomes altogether shadowy and mythical: we fall an easy prey to some "Baconian hypothesis" about the authorship of his plays, and take a final leave, so far as he is concerned, of criticism and common sense.

The historical method of dealing with prodigies, though it may be thought irreverent in literature as in religion, is in reality the only method which is consistent with reasonable and just appreciation. It is only when we have examined the materials prepared for the hand of the workman, and when we have compared the edifice raised by the master builder with those achieved by others who worked with similar materials and in a like style, that we can hope to distinguish that which belongs to circumstance and the age from that which is the peculiar and individual contribution of genius. And it is no new remark that, as in the case of Shakspere the contribution of the individual genius was more liberal than had been hitherto made by man, so also was the stock of materials

more abundant and the conjunction of circumstances more favourable than any which had been up to this time vouchsafed by nature. The Germans envy not his genius only, but also his circumstances: "The passionate sympathy of the people for the art of the stage, the merry life of the court, the activity of a great city, the prosperity of a youthful State, the multitude of distinguished men, of famous persons by sea and land, in the cabinet and in the field, who were concentrated in London, the ecclesiastical and political advance on all sides, the scientific discoveries, the progress of the arts in other branches,—all this combined to produce the poet, whose fascinated eye rested upon this whole movement. . . . All that belonged to the theatrical apparatus—the means and the material—lay ready for the great poet's dramatic art. No great dramatist of any other nation has met with a foundation for his art of such enviable extent and strength, with such completeness of well-prepared materials for its construction, as ancient tradition and present practice afforded to Shakespeare." *

Shakspere was in no sense the founder of a school. If Shakspere had never been born, the world would have been immeasurably poorer, but England would still have had her great dramatic age. That age had already been inaugurated by *Doctor Faustus*, by *Edward II.*, and the originals of *Henry VI.*, before Shakspere appeared as anything more than an elaborator of other

* Gervinus, *Shakespeare Commentaries*, translated by Bunnètt, ed. 1877, p. 82. (With slight alterations in the translation.)

men's work; and his later contemporaries, notwithstanding their debt to him and to each other, have an essential independence. The movement was national, and that in a sense deeper than at first appears. There has been much loose statement about the origin of the drama, and a good deal of vague declamation about the combination of causes which conduced to its exceptional development in the England of Elizabeth: and though we have not to deal directly with Elizabethan dramatists, yet, for reasons which will hereafter appear, we cannot altogether neglect these questions. The fundamental statement that the "drama had everywhere a religious origin," is, when applied to this period, in part untrue and in part barren or misleading. Better were it at once to return to Aristotle, and say "man naturally takes pleasure in imitation, and imitation is either by way of narration or by way of action." * To which let us add, that the second of these two ways seems to be the more natural to man, but in literature has usually been preceded by the other, which needs less of external accessory for its full effect; while at the same time there have been natural tendencies to blend the two, and the rhapsode who recited the parting of Hector and Andromaché, differed not essentially from the actor who narrated the farewells of Alcestis.

* "Let two people join in the same scheme to ridicule a third, and either take advantage of or invent some story for that purpose, and mimicry will have already produced a kind of rude comedy. . . . The first man of genius who seizes this idea and reduces it into form, into a work of art by metre and music, is the Aristophanes of the country." (Coleridge, *Lecture on the Progress of the Drama.*)

The connection of the drama with formal religion was even among the Greeks rather of the accidental kind. Scenic representations demanded the assemblage of a crowd; religious festivals supplied this condition, and the narrative dithyramb was there rapidly supplanted by the more attractive way of imitation. Similarly in modern Europe the dramatic instinct, always ready to seize opportunities of indulging itself, displayed itself naturally upon popular festivals and holidays, that is to say in the Middle Ages upon festivals of the Church; and laid rude hands upon the only subjects to which the popular mind was open. Unhappily the Church, while utilizing this tendency for religious purposes, had power at first to suppress it for all others; and though the popular taste for buffoonery was considerably indulged in the so-called sacred performances, "interloping," that is to say intrusion of the public into what was regarded as the province of the clergy, was strenuously denounced. Instead of being credited with keeping alive the taste for dramatic representation, the Church should rather be regarded as arresting its development, and confining it within limits which were inconsistent with art. Whether the Reformation of religion did anything for the drama in England may fairly be doubted. It is at least certain that without a Reformation the national drama of Spain was developed at the same period with a vigour and brilliancy unmatched except in England, although in Spain too its growth in popularity was viewed with disfavour by the Church, in so far at least as it was not retained in

the service of religion. It is possible indeed that the Reformation in England hastened the time when licence was given to actors to perform regular stage plays, but in other respects its influence was wholly antagonistic. It is only when men are comparatively indifferent to theological controversy, that they have room for the interest in human life and human character which the art of the dramatist presupposes. To say that the Elizabethan drama sprang from "religion" in the ordinary sense of the word, is not more true than to say that it sprang from irreligion. Unless, indeed, all art which regards human life in a serious spirit is religious, the English drama must not be so called. "Just as Bacon banished religion from science, so did Shakespeare from art." *

The English drama sprang indeed directly from that human nature to which it so faithfully held up the mirror; but it possessed one condition which, according to European experience at least, seems indispensable to a great dramatic age, that is the pride and enthusiasm of nationality. The almost miraculous defeat of the Armada was to the England of Shakspere what Marathon and Salamis were to the Athens of Æschylus; and this is what must be meant when it is said that the drama was national. Not till faction was silenced and Catholic and Protestant forgot their differences in a

* Gervinus, *Shakespeare Commentaries*, translated by Bunnètt, ed. 1877, p. 886. The views of Gervinus on this subject seem to have caused some controversy in Germany: see the pamphlet *Das Buch, Shakspere von Gervinus; ein Wort über Dasselbe*, by H. von Friesen: but the countrymen of Shakspere will probably agree with Gervinus.

common patriotism, did the stage win its acceptance as the proper vehicle of expression for the thoughts and feelings of the people. The dramatist is in more immediate contact with the life of his age than any other kind of writer, and consequently reflects every phase of it more accurately, and feels more instantaneously every change. It would seem that for its higher development the drama demands not a select circle of hearers and readers, but a whole population roused to sympathy with great actions and to a catholic interest in human life and character. Whence can come this common touch which raises a whole population from the sordid interest and commonplace routine of every-day life to something of enthusiasm for the ideal, to a desire to see represented not only the comedy or farce of their own vulgar lives, but the drama which suggests widest problems of human destiny and gives scope for highest heroisms and deepest crimes? What might be we know not, but so far as experience can answer the question it is replied that the enthusiasm of nationality alone can do this. We seem to be at present in a state of transition from particular patriotism to universal sympathy: and it may be that some cosmopolitan enthusiasm of humanity is capable of supplying the place of the narrower influence; but hitherto it has proved too watery a mixture. In England under Elizabeth, as at Athens under Pericles, the united enthusiasm of patriotism, the conscious pride and sympathy of a common nationality were the elevating influences. Yet it must not be inferred that the interests excited were connected only with national themes.

Athens had indeed the *Persæ*, the *Eumenides*, the *Œdipus Coloneus;* England had her great historical dramas in almost unbroken series from King John to King Henry VIII.;* and their effect upon the audience is strikingly described by a contemporary:† but sympathy with national exploits and national heroes grew easily into sympathy with heroism and the heroic in human nature itself, while each man felt himself and his neighbour raised out of their narrow and vulgar sphere by sharing in the glories of a common country. When England became great each Englishman felt himself enrolled in the heroic rank, and began to recognize lofty action as congenial to his character, and great men as his fellows; the humanity which he shared acquired in his eyes a new dignity, and the problems of human life and destiny had a fresh interest for one who had learnt to regard them as concerning himself, and to look upon his own individual life as a thing not unworthy to be ordered by philosophy. It may be thought that these are brave words, and that mere patriotism could never have accomplished even the tenth part of this; but we must beware of judging by the standard of to-day. We touch the masses of our people now with no enthusiasms for the ideal, and patriotism appears to be dying a natural death amid general execration.

This art then was national in the widest sense, and as such it was essentially original. The direct in-

* Filling up the gaps in Shakspere's series we have *Edward I.* by Peele, *Edward II.* by Marlowe, *Edward III.*, anonymous (perhaps partly Shaksperian), *Edward IV.* (in two parts) by Thomas Heywood.

† Thomas Heywood, in his *Apology for Actors.*

fluence of classical models, however much felt at the universities, was little enough perceptible upon the public stage.* And, with the doubtful exception of Gorboduc, Sidney, judging the tragedies and comedies of his own day by classical standards, pronounced that they observed rules "neither of honest civility nor skilful poetry;" and complained that the authors would always unseasonably "thrust in the clown by the head and shoulders, to play a part in majestical matters with neither decency nor discretion."† The last point is eminently characteristic of the English stage; the clown had successfully invaded even the mysteries and moralities performed under the auspices of the Church, and that "leading principle of the romantic drama," the portrayal of human life in all its variety, was, we may suspect, chiefly evolved from the English national taste for buffoonery.‡ This art, like everything which has native originality, evolved its perfection out of itself, and

* It is likely enough that most of the dramatists, in spite of university education, were in much the same case as Shakspere as regards Latin and Greek, which was perhaps fortunate in an age when it was difficult to be a scholar without being also a pedant. The most notable exceptions are Chapman and Jonson. The use which the latter made of his learning generally is well known, but not perhaps the fact (noticed by Cumberland) that the song, "Drink to me only with thine Eyes," is closely translated from passages in the love-letters of Philostratus,—a fact which proves not only the extent of his reading but his power of making good use of unlikely material.

† Sidney died in 1586. The *Defence of Poesie* was not published till 1595, but was probably written in 1583.

‡ Even Milton, with all his admiration of Shakspere, speaks of the "poets' error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity, or introducing trivial and vulgar persons; which by all judicious hath been counted absurd, and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people." (Preface to *Samson Agonistes.*)

accepted no external standard or rules; and if ultimately the principles of the English romantic drama be found, as Lessing found them, to be essentially in accordance with the classical rules, that fact may be accepted as an independent confirmation of the validity of those rules. Not that their apparent rejection of classical rules was generally thought by the writers themselves to be theoretically defensible. Herein the national genius asserted its influence over this particular branch of literature, that men who despised the popular taste nevertheless indulged it, and so involuntarily worked out their own artistic destinies. From some of these men, too, might have come the naïve confession of the Spanish dramatist, who at this very time was leading the development of an equally national drama in his own country: "When I am going to write a play I lock up my precepts with six keys, and cast Terence and Plautus out of my study, lest they should cry out against me, as truth is wont to do even from dumb volumes; for I write by the art which those invented who sought the applause of the multitude, who ought to be humoured in their folly, seeing that they pay." * But though we may be disposed

* Lope de Vega, *Arte nuevo de hacer Comedias en este tiempo.* Sismondi, in his *History of the Literature of Southern Europe*, quoting this, remarks, "The Spanish scholars of this period, becoming disciples of the classical authors, upheld with as much fervour as La Harpe and Marmontel among the French the poetical system of Aristotle, and the rules of the three unities. The dramatic writers, while they recognized the authority of these rules, neglected to act upon them, for they were compelled to follow the taste of the public. None of them were acquainted with the nature of the independence which they possessed, or of that system of romantic poetry which has been only in our own day developed by the Germans." (Roscoe's translation, third edition, vol. ii. p. 233.)

to think that the direct influence of the revival of classical literature upon the development of the English drama may easily be overrated, we must acknowledge one external influence which was undoubtedly powerful. The introduction of Italian literature into England supplied food for the imagination of the people and materials for the craft of the dramatist to an extent which it is difficult for us, with our present stores of native fiction, to realize. No wonder that "men made more account of a story from Boccaccio than a story from the Bible." To men eager for new experiences of life the wealth of incident in the Italian novels must have brought a hitherto undreamt-of excitement and intoxication.* But however foreign literature may have supplied the materials, the national genius determined the use which was made of them, and rules of art were neither accepted from abroad nor consciously developed at home.

Such a national impulse could not have had its beginning and end in a single man, nor is it likely that principles of art which were so unquestionably developed from popular instincts should have been practically realized by one alone of the dramatists whom the time produced, however immeasurably he may have overtopped the rest in individual genius. It is not sought to establish any republican equality in literature, but, while acknowledging the legitimate sovereign, we must also claim recognition for the aristocracy out of whose ranks

* The "pamphlets" of Robert Greene and others, for which there was so great a demand at the end of the sixteenth century, were to a great extent adaptations or imitations of Italian novels.

he rose. To speak, as some Shaksperian critics speak, of the contemporary dramatists as rich indeed in creative power but destitute of the regulating mind, is a blunder differing only in degree from that of the French critics who discover in Shakspere himself nothing but barbaric splendour and magnificent chaos. "Misused freedom and power, disfigured form, distorted truth, stunted greatness—these are everywhere the characteristics of the works of these poets. In the strictest contrast to the French theatre, ridiculing all rules, void of all criticism, and without any power of arrangement, they generally compound a wild heap of ill-connected events of the most opposite character in an exciting confusion of buffoonery and horror." * Every word of this, which is applied without distinction to writers so many leagues apart as Webster and Munday, Ben Jonson and Nat Field, might no doubt be justified by some of the productions of the age, as probably similar language might be justified by some of the productions of any age of exuberant literary or artistic fertility, but in its general application it conveys an impression which is essentially untrue.

Nor, again, is it correct to regard Shakspere as the centre of a system, a sun with inferior orbs revolving round it and dominated by its influence. This is the idea expressed in Colman's well-known prologue on the revival of *Philaster*—

> "Beaumont and Fletcher, those twin stars that run
> Their glorious course round Shakespeare's golden sun."

* Gervinus, p. 80 (Bunnètt's translation).

Whereas in fact these two writers in particular were the leaders of a younger generation and a newer school, notwithstanding the fact that the career of the first was run to its close before the death of Shakspere. We must look upon the dramatists who formed this school as influenced rather indirectly by the national movement of patriotism. They feel the effects of the movement rather than the movement itself. The enthusiasm which has provided them with theatres, with companies of actors, with audiences interested in their art, is not the spirit which animates them, at least in its original form. It is turning more and more into a purely literary impulse, and appeals to patriotism are abandoned to writers who supply the wants of more vulgar audiences than those of the *Globe* and the *Blackfriars*. Then, it may be asked, what need to have touched upon the questions connected with the original impulse? And the answer is not simply that the general interest in dramatic art which this impulse called forth was a primary condition of the existence of any school of dramatists whatever, but also that unless we clearly understand what the nature of this original impulse was we shall be at a loss to understand the changes which led to decadence; and certainly in this particular case the history of origin and the history of decline confirm and illustrate one another in a most remarkable manner. To what extent the decline proceeded in the case of our present subject, and of what nature it was, will, it may be hoped, become apparent in the course of this essay.

But with whatever school we may be dealing, the

method of criticism must evidently be the same in all cases where the work is worth examination at all. Whether we follow or not that interpretation of Hamlet, "which is like a key to the works of the poet," we must at least endeavour to reject "all divided beauty," to explain the whole by the whole, and to feel "the soul of the outer framework, and the animating breath, which created and organized the immortal work." Yet let us beware, and it is a danger which German criticism has not always escaped, of attributing to the original writers that system of æsthetics which we may extract from their works. Instinctively the best of them, and above all Shakspere, have felt their way to an artistic unity, which our criticism may analyse and justify, but it must not be supposed that what is to the critic the "leading idea" of the play was necessarily present as such to the consciousness of the writer, still less that it was fixed upon from the first in his mind and worked out by deliberately selected modes of expression. There may be a moral effect without a moral purpose; an idea may be expressed in concrete shape by a work of art, which has never found form or expression except in the concrete. Creative inspiration goes before criticism, and rather makes rules than conforms to them,* being at the same time unconscious perhaps of its true relation to universal art; and Shakspere himself would possibly have been as much at a loss how to give an account of the "motives"

* As Ben Jonson says, "Before they [the grammarians and philosophers] found out those laws, there were many excellent poets that fulfilled them."

of his works, as the poets, tragic and dithyrambic, who were cross-examined by Socrates.*

Yet because of our deficiency in instinctive sympathy with the highest creative art, this analysis seems to be necessary for our full understanding of the significance of the highest creative work; and it is one of the objects of the present essay to perform this service, however incompletely, for the work of one who, among his contemporaries, stands nearest to Shakspere, certainly in promise and perhaps also in performance; while at the same time it may help in some degree to restore to English literature an individuality long obscured, partly by the darkness which envelopes the lives of almost all the dramatists, and partly by the hopelessness hitherto of distinguishing the characteristics even of his work, in its inextricable combination with that of his fellow-worker.

But first, to invest the subject with such bodily form as may be attained, let the few biographical facts be here thrown together which have been carried down by the stream of time—a river which, so far as regards the lives of the dramatists, has brought down to us the light things, and allowed the weighty to sink to the bottom. For the biographical facts acknowledgment must be made chiefly to Dyce, whose statement is a model of accuracy.

* "Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a kind of genius or inspiration." (Plato, *Apology*, p. 22, B.)

II.

FRANCIS BEAUMONT was the third son of Francis Beaumont of Grace Dieu under Charnwood Forest, in Leicestershire,* who became a Justice of the Common Pleas in 1593; and of Anne, daughter of Sir George Pierrepoint, of Holme-Pierrepoint, in Nottinghamshire. Judge Beaumont had three sons, Henry, John, and Francis, and one daughter, Elizabeth, considerably the youngest of the family. The exact date of the birth of Francis is

* The inscriptions written by Wordsworth for the grounds of Coleorton, the seat of Sir George Beaumont, contain allusions both to the dramatist and to his elder brother:—

> "Here may some Painter sit in future days,
> Some future Poet meditate his lays
> Not mindless of that distant age renowned
> When Inspiration hovered o'er this ground,
> The haunt of him who sang how spear and shield
> In civil conflict met on Bosworth-field:
> And of that famous youth full soon removed
> From earth, perhaps by Shakespeare's self approved,
> Fletcher's Associate, Jonson's Friend beloved."

And again, in another piece:—

> "There on the margin of a streamlet wild,
> Did Francis Beaumont sport, an eager child;
> There under shadow of the neighbouring rocks,
> Sang youthful tales of shepherds and their flocks;
> Unconscious prelude to heroic themes,
> Heartbreaking sighs, and melancholy dreams,
> Of slighted love, and scorn, and jealous rage,
> With which his genius shook the buskined stage."

uncertain—tradition says 1586, a date which seems to have been arrived at from the statement of Jonson to Drummond, that his death (in March, 1616) took place before the completion of his thirtieth year. Against this, Dyce sets first the fact that in the funeral certificate of his father, dated April 22, 1598, he is described as "Frauncys third sonne, of the age of thirteen or more," and secondly, that he is said to have been entered at Broadgate's Hall, Oxford, in February, 1597, at the age of twelve.* The register of his baptism has not been discovered. On the whole, perhaps, it is more probable that his birth was in 1584 or 1585,† and that when he died he had completed his thirty-first year. Jonson may well have been mistaken on such a point, and we may remark that Fletcher was traditionally supposed to have been born in 1576, on the authority of a statement in the first folio that his age at death was forty-nine,‡ until

* It is not, however, Anthony Wood who makes this statement. He gives, indeed, the date of the entry of "Francis Beaumont," but without any statement of age, and adds that this was not the dramatist, whom he supposes to have been educated at Cambridge. The age is supplied by Wood's editor, who corrects his mistake, and quotes the entry from the matriculation book.

† His eldest brother, Henry, was born at the end of 1581; the second son, John, is variously stated to have been born in 1582 and 1584. The former date seems to have the better authority. Dyce vainly searched the registers of Belton for a record of the baptism of Francis, and draws the conclusion that he was probably not born at Grace Dieu. But though Grace Dieu is locally within the parish of Belton, it is extra-parochial, and the Beaumonts may well have been baptised at Coleorton, the registers of which begin in 1611.

‡ The editors of the day, if editors they can be called, were careless enough about such things. Thomas Randolph is said, in the first edition of his works, to have died in 1635, aged twenty-seven, whereas we know that he was born in 1605.

Dyce discovered the register of his baptism, dated December, 1579. One of the elder brothers, John (afterwards Sir John) Beaumont, was celebrated as a poet in his own day, and has been admired even in ours. Wordsworth, whose allusion to him has already been quoted, paid him the compliment of adopting part of a line from his poem of *Bosworth Field.*

Francis, who had been entered as aforesaid at Broadgate's Hall in 1597, seems to have taken no University degree, and was admitted a member of the Inner Temple, November 3, 1600. A poem called *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, was published anonymously in 1602, which was afterwards attributed to him. But, notwithstanding Dyce's opinion that he may have been the author, most readers of this poem will probably be inclined to ascribe it to some hand more practised in versification than that of the young law-student, who at this time could not have been more than eighteen years old. The poem is of the school of *Venus and Adonis*, written apparently with much facility, and showing some richness of fancy, but nothing of the serious tone which afterwards characterized the dramatist, whose genius moreover moved rather heavily when divorced from the stage, if we may judge from those "poems" which are ascribed to him without dispute—dull and rather laborious compositions, these elegies on great ladies who made unfortunate marriages, and even the letter to Ben Jonson, which has human interest of its own, is not adorned by much felicity of phrase. When to this it is added that the external evidence of authorship comes after all to little

or nothing,* we shall be content, perhaps, to leave *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* anonymous, as at the first.

It is probable that Francis Beaumont was not dependent either upon his profession or upon literary labours for subsistence. That he ever seriously followed the profession of the law there is no reason to suppose. At what time he became acquainted with Fletcher is uncertain; perhaps not until 1608 or thereabouts; but it is certain that before this date he was on intimate terms with Ben Jonson, whose comedy of *Volpone* was published in 1607, with commendatory verses from Beaumont headed, "To my dear friend, Master Ben Jonson," and expressing that contemptuous opinion of the public taste which was almost as characteristic of him as of Jonson.

He paid a similar compliment to two subsequent plays, *The Silent Woman*, and *Catiline;* and on one occasion, when staying in the country, wrote to Jonson the poetical epistle in which the doings at the Mermaid are alluded to, to which Jonson replied in lines which testify respect as well as affection—

> "How I do love thee, Beaumont, and thy Muse,
> That unto me dost such religion use!
> How I do fear myself, that am not worth
> The least indulgent thought thy pen drops forth!
> At once thou mak'st me happy and unmak'st;
> And giving largely to me, more thou tak'st.
> What fate is mine, that so itself bereaves?
> What art is thine, that so thy friend deceives?
> When even there, where most thou praisest me,
> For writing better I must envy thee."

* As shall be shown in an appendix.

It must be recorded also that Jonson long afterwards expressed to Drummond the opinion, "Francis Beaumont loved too much himself and his own verses."

We are told by Aubrey that he lived with Fletcher at the Bankside (in Southwark), not far from the playhouse (that is the Globe), and that they carried the maxim, *κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων*, to a greater length than is usually convenient. Almost the only other fact preserved about his social life is that his friends called him "Frank."

"Some that thy name abbreviate call thee Franck,"

says Davies, and Heywood in his record of the curtailment of poets' names corroborates the statement.*

The failure of Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, in 1610, called forth a copy of verses from his friend expressing much contempt of the popular judgment. Finally, the community of goods was broken up by the marriage of Beaumont, perhaps about 1613, to Ursula, daughter of H. Isley, of Sundridge in Kent, by whom he had two daughters (one posthumous). In 1613 he was employed by the Societies of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn, to furnish a masque on the occasion of the marriage of the Lady Elizabeth, daughter of James I., to the Prince Palatine. This performance was printed with a dedication to Sir Francis Bacon, then Solicitor-General, "whose good word is able to add value to the greatest and least matters," and to the Bench of the two Houses.

Beaumont died, March 6, 1616—

"Beaumont dies young, so Sidney died before."

* "Excellent Bewmont, in the formost ranke
Of the rar'st wits, was never more than Franck."

Little trust could be placed in the testimony of commendatory verses that the fire of his genius fretted his body to decay,* but his brother also, in the feeling lines headed "An epitaph upon my dearest brother Francis Beaumont," seems to make the same suggestion :—

> "On Death, thy murderer, this revenge I take,
> I slight his terror, and just question make,
> Which of us two the best precedence have,
> Mine to this wretched world, thine to the grave.
> Thou shouldst have followed me, but Death, to blame,
> Miscounted years, and measured age by fame.
> So dearly has thou bought thy precious lines,
> Their praise grew swiftly as thy life declines.
> Thy Muse, the hearer's queen, the reader's love,
> All ears, all hearts but Death's could please and move."

He was buried at the entrance of St. Benedict's chapel in Westminster Abbey, on the 9th of March, but apparently no inscription has ever been placed upon his tomb. The visitor to the Abbey will in vain attempt to identify its position by the indications afforded in Basse's well-known epitaph on Shakspere,—

> "Renownèd Spenser, lie a thought more nigh
> To learnèd Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lie
> A little nearer Spenser, to make room
> For Shakespeare in your threefold, fourfold tomb.
> To lodge all four in one bed make a shift
> Until Doomsday, for hardly will a fift
> Betwixt this day and that by Fate be slain,
> For whom your curtains may be drawn again."—

for none of the various readings seem to agree with the true position of the tombs.† Surely the place might at

* "Beaumont is dead, by whose sole death appears,
Wit's a disease consumes men in few years."
(Rich. Corbet.)

† See *Shakespeare's Centurie of Prayse*, 2nd edition, p. 137.

least be indicated by a simple name and date, in that transept where the inscription that so naïvely commemorates his early friend attracts the eye of every passer by. That his genius was highly valued by his contemporaries is proved, not only by the lines above quoted and by the respect of Ben Jonson for one so much younger than himself, but also by the precedence which his name had always over Fletcher's, and by the use which was made of it by booksellers, who constantly attributed to him a share in plays in which he could have had no part, and passed off under his name poems by authors so well known and so popular as Cleveland and Waller. One elegy deserves to be quoted here, both for its intrinsic merit, and because it is possibly Fletcher's last tribute to the genius of his associate. It was found by Dyce among the Harleian MSS., with the signature I. F., and placed between two songs which were undoubtedly written by Fletcher. The authorship therefore is tolerably certain, but the application must of course remain doubtful. In any case, the lines are sufficiently appropriate.

"*A Sonnet.*

"Come, Sorrow, come! bring all thy cries,
All thy laments, and all thy weeping eyes!
Burn out, you living monuments of woe!
Sad sullen griefs, now rise and overflow!
Virtue is dead;
Ah cruel fate!
All youth is fled;
All our laments too late.
Oh, noble youth, to thy ne'er dying name,
Oh, happy youth, to thy still growing fame,

To thy long peace in earth, this sacred knell
Our last loves ring—farewell, farewell, farewell!
Go, happy soul, to thy eternal birth;
And press his body lightly, gentle earth." *

This is all, and it is little enough, that is known of the person and life of Francis Beaumont. The obscurity which surrounds him veils from us also the personality of most of his fellows. Of their lives and characters nothing or next to nothing is known except what can be gathered from their works, and the better the dramatist the less we learn from his works of his own individuality. Of Shakspere vast research has revealed little or nothing, while of Beaumont, of Webster, of Ford, of Tourneur we know hardly even the dates of birth and death. Their personalities are almost a blank. Ben Jonson indeed is a living and massive reality—

"Broad-based, broad-fronted, bounteous, multiform;"

to him it is granted still to breathe in bodily form the breath of life—

οἵῳ πεπνῦσθαι, τοὶ δὲ σκιαὶ ἀΐσσουσιν.

But perhaps we need not much lament the fate of these eloquent shades. Destiny has determined that of the personality of the dramatic poet we need know nothing; his creation is complete in itself and stands apart from the individual nature of the man.† To know much of him

* I have adopted Dyce's readings. The last line will remind us of Aspatia's song in *The Maid's Tragedy;* the expression is repeated in *Bonduca,* and the thought is common enough.

† For the distinction in this matter between the objective and the subjective poet, see Mr. Robert Browning's preface to the (spurious) *Letters of Shelley,* 1851. Republished by the Browning Society.

might set us on tracking his private relations through the characters and situations which he has drawn,* and the dramatic effect might be marred. Enough if we can objectively appreciate his work, and recognize rightly the characteristics of his genius.

* Already it is inferred from *Twelfth Night*, ii. 4, that Shakspere was unhappy in marriage because his wife had more years than himself.

III.

"In the large book of plays you late did print
In Beaumont's and in Fletcher's name, why in't
Did you not justice? Give to each his due?
For Beaumont of those many writ in few,
And Massinger in other few, the main
Being sole issues of sweet Fletcher's brain."

THUS wrote one who was a friend of poets but no poet himself,* to the publishers of the first folio edition of Beaumont and Fletcher;† and the complaint is just, if it can be assumed that the persons addressed could have done that which is suggested,—an assumption which is apparently made by one of those persons in the preface to that folio: "It was once in my thoughts," he says, "to have printed Mr. Fletcher's works by themselves, because single and alone he would make a just volume; but since never parted while they lived, I conceived it not equitable to separate their ashes." But the age was not an age of criticism, and play-writers, except Jonson, were not very careful to claim their literary wares when once sold; added to which, Fletcher had been dead more than twenty years, and Beaumont more than thirty, so that we may take leave to doubt whether the

* Sir Aston Cockaine.

† This edition, printed in 1647, contains only so many of the plays as had not been before printed separately in quarto. The folio of 1679 was the first collected edition of the whole.

authority of Humphrey Moseley on the question of respective authorship would have been much more valuable than that of the writers of commendatory verses, or of prologues and epilogues upon the revival of plays.

However that may be, it will not be denied that an endeavour to make a division between these "twin stars," and to appreciate the very different qualities of genius which live in their ashes, would be a legitimate employment for criticism; and of this task a part is to be attempted here. Our present aim is so far to isolate Beaumont that we shall be able to assign to him his place in the hierarchy of genius: to make him what he has not hitherto been for most readers, a distinct personality; and to point out the characteristics by which he may be recognized.

In truth, the fame of Beaumont has been obscured partly by his own early death, and partly by the fecundity of his partner. The world is aware that here are more than fifty plays, mostly well-reputed, in all of which Fletcher is commonly thought to have had some share; while many, perhaps most, were produced by Fletcher alone. The conclusion is a vague wonder that the name of Beaumont should stand first in the partnership, and a tendency to confer the laurels upon his associate alone.* But when we find in arranging these

* It is against this that Sir Aston Cockaine protests in his lines to Charles Cotton—

> "They were two wits and friends, and who
> Robs from the one to glorify the other,
> Of these great memories is a partial Lover."

He proceeds to charge his cousin with neglect to inform the printers that

fifty or more plays in something like chronological order, that we have placed at the beginning of the list nearly all those reputed to be the best,* a result which would hardly follow in the case of any other dramatist, and when we discover also that the excellence developed in the later plays is an excellence of a totally different kind from that which we found at first, the conjecture is natural that the partner who died first may have contributed something to the common stock which deserves special attention,—attention which it cannot duly receive until criticism has performed its functions of analysis.

That the analysis can be performed there need be little doubt, in spite of the popular notion, both of the poets' time and of other times also, that these authors were inseparable,—

> "In fame as well as writings both so knit,
> That no man knows where to divide your wit."

Yet there were certainly floating ideas also in the poets' own time about the characteristics of each, ideas which have become traditional, in so far at least that they are handed down from one editor to another; as, for example,

most of the plays in the edition just published were written after Beaumont's death.

* The following are the plays which are known by external evidence to have been produced during Beaumont's life, *The Woman Hater*, *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *A King and No King*, *Cupid's Revenge*, *The Coxcomb*, *The Captain*, *The Scornful Lady*, and *The Honest Man's Fortune*. Of these, excluding *The Faithful Shepherdess*, which was Fletcher's alone, five at least are in the very first rank among the authors' works, and were surpassed by none of those which followed.

that Beaumont was "a plummet" hung on Fletcher's wit to keep down its flights; that the latter was the creator, and the former the critic; that Beaumont composed the plots, and Fletcher the dialogue; that Beaumont was a grave tragic genius, while Fletcher excelled most in comedy;

> "That should the stage embattle all its force,
> Fletcher would lead the foot, Beaumont the horse;"

that in their works were combined in harmony

> Fletcher's keen treble, and deep Beaumont's base;"

various opinions expressed by various people, and doubtless having most of them some foundation, but not such a one as we can be content to build upon if any other is forthcoming.

On the whole, external evidence can do little for us in this matter except indirectly; but indirectly it may be made to do much. The obvious difficulty which meets us at the outset is that we have little or nothing which we can at once set down as the unassisted composition of Beaumont; but on the other hand we have much upon which we are entitled without hesitation to set the name of Fletcher, even when the largest possible allowance has been made for co-operation with Massinger and others; and thus we can come into contact with the mind of one of the fellow-workers, and we are able to criticise its issues, not indeed at the time when he was actually in partnership with his younger friend, but immediately after that time, when his tone of mind and manner of expression can hardly have suffered much

change, though probably the individuality would to some extent have been developed after co-operation had ceased. Evidently there is a *prima facie* ground for expecting that the hand of Fletcher may thus be tracked throughout the whole series, and it may not unfairly be assumed that those characteristics of the earlier plays of which no trace is perceptible in the later are due to Beaumont. The point of chronology is first to be considered.

The *prima facie* evidence for the chronology of the plays may be thus rapidly summed up.

Five, besides Beaumont's *Masque*, were printed not later than 1616:—

The Woman Hater, 1607.

The Faithful Shepherdess, not dated, but dedicated partly to Sir William Skipwith, who died on the 3rd of May, 1610.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle, 1613, after being kept by the publisher for two years.

Cupid's Revenge, 1615; acted on the Sunday after New-year's day, 1612.

The Scornful Lady, 1616.

The following are known by other evidence to have been produced in the same period:—

Philaster, mentioned by John Davies in his *Epigrams* (published according to Oldys in 1611); printed in 1620.

The Maid's Tragedy, before the 31st of October, 1611, when a play was licensed under the title of *The Second Maid's Tragedy;* printed in 1619.

A King and No King, allowed to be acted in 1611; printed in 1619.

The Coxcomb, acted before November, 24, 1612.

The Captain, acted before May 20, 1613.

The Honest Man's Fortune, "Plaide in 1613," according to the MS. copy licensed in 1624 (Herbert's *Office Book*).

The following also were produced not later than 1619:—

Bonduca,
The Knight of Malta,
Valentinian,
The Queen of Corinth,*
The Mad Lover,
} in all of which Richard Burbadge played, who died March 13, 1619.

The Loyal Subject, licensed in 1616.

Later than 1619:—

The Island Princess, acted at Court, 1621.
The Pilgrim, acted at Court, 1621.
The Wild-Goose Chase, acted at Court, 1621.
The Prophetess, licensed 1622.
The Sea Voyage, licensed 1622.
The Spanish Curate, licensed 1622.
The Beggar's Bush, acted at Court, 1622.
Love's Cure, apparently containing an allusion to the Russian Ambassador "lying lieger" in England during the winter of 1622.†
The Maid in the Mill, licensed 1623.
A Wife for a Month, licensed 1624.
Rule a Wife and have a Wife, licensed 1624, printed in 1640.
The Nice Valour, has an allusion to a book published in 1624.
The Fair Maid of the Inn, licensed January, 1626.
The Noble Gentleman, licensed February, 1626.
The Elder Brother, containing allusions in the prologue and epilogue to the death of the author, which occurred in August, 1625; printed in 1637.
The Lovers' Progress, perhaps left unfinished by Fletcher at his death.
The Night Walker, printed 1640; perhaps an alteration of Fletcher's *Devil of Dowgate*, written 1623, now lost.

About the following there is no precise evidence of date, but some of them, marked with an asterisk, have lists of actors in the folio of 1679, which do not include

* The *Queen of Corinth* cannot be earlier than 1616, for it contains an allusion to Coryate's *Crudities*, published in that year.

† This play has its scenes in Spain, which, as Mr. Nicholson has remarked, is almost enough to justify the conclusion that it was as late as 1621.

Burbadge, from which it has been inferred that they are later than March 13, 1619; the rest have no list attached to them :—

Four Plays in One.
Thierry and Theodoret, printed in 1621.
The Two Noble Kinsmen, printed in 1634.
*The Little French Lawyer.**
Wit at Several Weapons.
Wit without Money, containing an allusion to an event of August, 1614; printed 1639.
The Custom of the Country, called an "old play" in 1628.
*The Laws of Candy.**
*The Double Marriage.**
*The False One.**
*The Humorous Lieutenant.**
*Women Pleased.**
The Woman's Prize.
The Chances.
Monsieur Thomas, printed in 1639.
Rollo, printed in 1639; perhaps contains an imitation of Jonson's masque, *Neptune's Triumph*, which was represented Twelfth Night, 1624.
Love's Pilgrimage.
The Faithful Friends.

In the above list, all those plays which were printed separately before 1647 are marked with the date of publication. The rest appeared in the folio of 1647, with the exception of *The Wild-Goose Chase*, which at that time was missing, but in 1652 was published separately in folio; and *The Faithful Friends*, which remained in manuscript until the present century, and of which the authorship is more than doubtful. With the exception of this last the whole collection was printed in 1679.

We have already quoted a statement of Aston Cockaine — several times repeated — that his friend Massinger contributed to this collection; and there is

reason to believe that both Rowley * and Shirley † had some share in a few of the plays, while Mr. Fleay is of opinion that Middleton ‡ also worked extensively with Fletcher. We know also that both Fletcher and Beaumont worked apart during the lifetime of the latter,§—Fletcher certainly in *The Faithful Shepherdess*, and Beaumont in the *Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn.* Moreover, a play now lost, called *The History of Mador, King of Great Britain*, was entered in the Stationers' Company's books in 1660, as the production of Beaumont alone; and the commendatory verses of Jasper Maine speak of "the divided pieces which the press Hath severally sent forth," as if it were matter of common knowledge that several of the published plays were individual work.

Apart from chronology however, the external evidence of authorship is of a very worthless kind. There is a large collection of commendatory verses referring either to particular plays or to the collection; but the tone of indiscriminate compliment which pervades

* Rowley assisted Fletcher in *The Maid in the Mill*, and perhaps in other plays.

† Shirley probably finished *The Lovers' Progress*, and perhaps revised *The Night Walker.*

‡ *The Widow* (not generally printed in this collection) is attributed to Fletcher, Middleton, and Jonson.

§ Fletcher had other partnerships even in Beaumont's lifetime, as is proved by the application of Field, Daborne and Massinger to Henslowe, for a loan to be "abated out of the money remayns for the play of Mr. Fletcher and ours." The co-operation with Shakspere may also be accepted as probable, though possibly *The Two Noble Kinsmen* may have been completed by Fletcher after Shakspere's death. *Henry VIII.* and *The History of Cardenio* were both acted in 1613.

almost all these productions is not likely to give us much confidence in the attribution of this or that drama or character to the person in whose honour the copy is written. The same plays are by different writers ascribed either to Beaumont with no mention of Fletcher, or to Fletcher with no mention of Beaumont.* If we were compelled to choose between these, the testimony of Earle, writing soon after Beaumont's death and in the lifetime of Fletcher, and being moreover personally acquainted with the former, would certainly claim the preference. It would be well, however, not to build much upon any such evidence.

The same may be said of the evidence of titlepages where we have it. Several of the early quartos were anonymous;† and where plays are ascribed to one or both authors, the ascription sometimes varies in successive editions, and when put forth by the same publisher.‡

Nor, again, can we attach any great weight to the evidence of prologues and epilogues, unless we can prove them to have been written by the authors of the play, or at least produced at its first appearance on the stage; and this is hardly to be proved in any instance, unless it be that of the prose prologue to *The Woman Hater*, from which we learn that the author of that play

* E.g. *The Maid's Tragedy*, ascribed to Beaumont alone by Earle, and to Fletcher alone by Waller.

† *E.g.* the first quartos of *The Woman Hater*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *The Masque*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Thierry and Theodoret*.

‡ As in the later quartos of *The Woman Hater* and *Thierry and Theodoret*.

had no taste for the fashion of prologues; and in fact the earlier plays of Beaumont and Fletcher are for the most part entirely without them.

The rest of the external evidence of authorship may be reduced to this: that Beaumont alone wrote the *Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn*, which is stated in the folio, and has never been doubted; that Fletcher alone wrote *The Faithful Shepherdess*, as is testified, not only by the titlepage of the first quarto, but irresistibly, so far as regards himself at least, by Beaumont in his verses, "To my friend Master John Fletcher, upon his *Faithful Shepherdess*"; and finally, Langbaine asserts that *The Woman Hater* was the work of Fletcher alone, a point in which he may have simply followed the authority of the quarto edition published in 1648.

It is evident, then, that the critic must place his dependence chiefly upon the internal evidences of style, subject always to the regulating influence of dates, where dates are ascertainable. But it will be necessary to approach this question of style at first from one side only, for while we have quite sufficient data to determine the characteristics of Fletcher's work, there is nothing which we can point to at once as the sole production of Beaumont except the *Masque*, and this being in its nature essentially different from the other works with which we are concerned will not serve as a satisfactory touchstone of style. For the same reason we must set aside *The Faithful Shepherdess* in our estimate of the dramatic style of Fletcher. This performance is quite

exceptional, and belongs to the class of pastoral poems rather than of plays, as indeed its audience perceived at its first production. And as regards the style of execution we may note the comparatively large proportion which is thrown undisguisedly into a lyrical form, and the fact that the whole is written in rhyming couplets with the exception of about 190 lines, nearly all of which occur in the first act. Evidently this is not a fair specimen of the dramatic style of Fletcher, either as regards versification or development of dialogue and plot.

To arrive at an estimate of Fletcher's true stage characteristics we must first select a few plays which we know to have been produced after Beaumont's death, and to which no suspicion of a second author has ever attached. This group might perhaps consist of the following (1) Tragedies or Tragi-comedies: *The Loyal Subject*, *The Island Princess*, *A Wife for a Month*; (2) Comedies: *The Wild-Goose Chase*, *The Pilgrim*, and *Rule a Wife and have a Wife*. Taking these as our starting point, and examining others of which the date is not so certain, we shall probably conclude that the following are by the same author, and show no evidence of other hands than his; in the first class—*Valentinian*, *Bonduca*, *The Mad Lover*, and *The Humorous Lieutenant*; and of comedies—*The Chances*, *Monsieur Thomas*, and *The Custom of the Country*. These thirteen plays should be enough for our purpose, though doubtless a few more might be added.*

* *The Double Marriage* is assigned to Fletcher alone by Mr. Fleay, on the ground apparently that it has the average proportion of double end-

It is well known that in the case of Fletcher the style of versification is a very distinctive mark. So much is this the case that there is some danger that other characteristics may be overlooked, and that it may be thought possible to track him by this mark alone. That it is a most valuable test cannot be denied, and the united presence in any passage of his most marked characteristics of versification may probably be held conclusive of his authorship. But their absence, partial or entire, can hardly be held conclusive of the opposite: for, in the first place, there may have been progressive development of style, and, in the second place, we have evidence that he sometimes deliberately chose a metrical system different from that which was usual to him, when the material with which he dealt seemed to require it. Putting aside the rhyming couplets of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, we have in it nearly two hundred lines of blank verse, which in style of versification differ from the blank verse of his other plays in almost every respect.

But before dealing with the metrical peculiarities of Fletcher, it is almost necessary to obtain standards of comparison by briefly tracing the development of blank verse in the hands of his predecessors. The earliest English plays, when in verse, were written either in rhymed Alexandrines, as *Ralph Roister Doister* and *King Cambyses*, or in blank verse, as *Gorboduc*. The latter, selected even by Sidney as the true metre of the

ings; but this method of counting syllables, and then dealing with the results in the mass, is hardly safe. In the first act at least the reader will detect little of Fletcher's rhythm.

English stage, and adopted by Kyd, Greene, and Marlowe, completely prevailed, though a certain tendency to rhyme is still occasionally visible, for example in Shakspere's earlier work. The characteristics of the early blank verse are an absolute regularity of structure, which admits of no redundant syllables, and the pause placed generally at the end of the verse, the sentences not running freely from one line to another, but having a tendency to fall into unrhymed couplets. The effect is a very marked verse with a monotonous cadence, which is in accordance with the declamatory character of the early tragedies. The following passage will illustrate what has been said :—

> "Ye all, my lords, I see, consent in one,
> And I as one consent with ye in all.
> I hold it more than need, with sharpest law
> To punish this tumultuous bloody rage.
> For nothing more may shake the common State,
> Than sufferance of uproars without redress.
> Whereby how some kingdoms of mighty power,
> After great conquests made, and flourishing
> In fame and wealth have been to ruin brought,
> I pray to Jove that we may rather wail
> Such hap in them than witness in ourselves."
>
> (*Gorboduc*, v. 1.)

This represents the general character of nearly all the blank verse before Shakspere. We find it in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, in Greene and Lodge's *Looking-glass for London and England*, and in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. It is true that blank verse did not pass from the hands of Marlowe unchanged. There is certainly a considerable development of freedom in the metre of

Edward the Second, which, as compared with *Doctor Faustus* for example, is a play of vigorous dramatic action, and demands a less stilted verse;* but some of Shakspere's early plays have almost all the old regularity of metre, together with a tendency to recur to additional trammels of rhyme. But in the early historical plays, *Richard II.* for example, and *Richard III.*, he has already asserted for himself far more freedom than was ventured upon by any of his predecessors, allowing resolution of syllables both at the end of the line and elsewhere, and varying the cadence of the verse by carrying on the sentence freely from one line to another. Without attempting to trace the progress of the Shaksperian versification we easily perceive that, as he advances, so advances the tendency towards a more dramatic form of verse, one with less appearance of premeditation, and with so much of irregularity of various kinds as to make the cadence unobtrusive in moments of action or passion, until we reach such lines as the following:—

> "I am sorry for 't;
> All faults I make, when I shall come to know them,
> I do repent. Alas! I have showed too much
> The rashness of a woman: he is touched
> To the noble heart. What's gone and what's past help
> Should be past grief: do not receive affliction
> At my petition: I beseech you rather
> Let me be punished that have minded you
> Of what you should forget."
>
> (*Winter's Tale*, iii. 2.)

* Collier regards Marlowe as the inventor of the redundant syllable in English blank verse.

Thus there is a steady development to be traced in the blank verse of the English stage, from a form suitable to rhetorical declamation, such as was suggested by the inferior classical models which were at first followed, to the ease and freedom which lively dramatic expression requires. And it is surprising that Dryden, able as he was to state the arguments against rhyming plays, "that rhyme is unnatural in a play, because dialogue there is presented as the effect of sudden thought," was yet for long unable to perceive that the rhyming system for which he contends, was, on the French stage at least, by whose example he recommends it, intimately connected with that tiresome declamation of which he elsewhere complains—"Look upon the *Cinna* and the *Pompey;* they are not so properly to be called plays, as long discourses of reason of state; . . . their actors speak by the hour-glass, like our parsons; nay, they account it the grace of their parts, and think themselves disparaged by the poet, if they may not twice or thrice in a play entertain the audience with a speech of an hundred lines." This, in fact, describes the style of Norton and Sackvil as well as that of Corneille.

But to return to Fletcher. Of his verse the most marked characteristic is freedom in the use of redundant syllables in all parts of the line, but especially at the end. At the end of the line he has commonly one, but often two, and occasionally even three or four * super-

* The following speech will furnish examples of this and some other characteristics :—

"God-a-mercy!
Thou hast hunted out a notable cause to kill me,

fluous syllables, though in some such cases it may be difficult to say whether or not an alexandrine was intended. So much is this the practice with him, that in his writings out of every three lines generally two at least have double or triple endings.* And even this enormous proportion is often far exceeded. No other writer not avowedly imitating Fletcher has anything like this number of female endings. Massinger sometimes approaches the proportion of 1 : 1, and Shakspere in his latest work has occasionally 1 : 2 (the first figure in each case representing the double-ending lines); but Fletcher actually reverses this last proportion and gives us 2 : 1. That is, in a play of 2500 lines Massinger might possibly have as many as 1200 double or triple endings, Shakspere in his last period might have

> A subtle one: I die for saving all you.
> Good sir, remember, if you can, the necessity,
> The rudeness of time, the state all stood in;
> * * * * * *
> Prithee find out a better cause, a handsomer;
> This will undo thee too: people will spit at thee;
> The devil himself would be ashamed of this cause.
> Because my haste made me forget the ceremony,
> The present danger everywhere, must my life satisfy?"
> (*Loyal Subject*, iv. 5.)

* Whether Fletcher was or was not a partner with Shakspere in *Henry VIII.*, it is certain that Wolsey's well-known speech, "Farewell, a long farewell," etc., affords a good example of the metrical peculiarity here described. And in substance, too, it can be paralleled from Fletcher's contemporary writings, *e.g.*—

> "Farewell
> To all our happiness, a long farewell!"
> (*Cupid's Revenge*, iv. 4);

see also *Wit at Several Weapons*, i. 1, for an adaptation to comedy of the idea of swimming on bladders.

as many as 850, while Fletcher would normally have at least 1700, and might not improbably give as many as 2000.* And the nature of the double ending is often not less characteristic than the frequency of its occurrence. The redundant syllable is often itself of no small weight, not a mere appendage, but an emphatic monosyllable perhaps, which cannot be slurred over lightly, *e.g.* :—

> "As many plagues as the corrupted air breeds."
> (*Island Princess*, ii. 1.)
>
> "But let's retire and alter, then we'll walk free."
> (*Pilgrim*, v. 2.)
>
> "'Tis true she's English born, but most part French now."
> (*Wild-Goose Chase*, iv. 2.)

Such rhythm as this can hardly be found systematically employed in any blank verse but Fletcher's.

The use of redundant syllables elsewhere than at the end of the line is also very frequent, and springs from the same tendency: they are often such as are slurred over in familiar speech, but often also true resolutions of the iambus into anapaest or tribrach, and make it necessary to read the verse rapidly by accent, and with no impertinent counting of syllables upon the fingers. The practice is by no means confined to comedy, though there it is naturally most conspicuous, *e.g.* :—

> "I have more to do with my honesty than to fool it,
> Or venture it in such leak barks as women.
> I put 'em off because I loved 'em not,
> Because they are too queasy for my temper,
> And not for thy sake, nor the contract-sake,
> Nor vows nor oaths; I have made a thousand of 'em:

* See Mr. Fleay's *Shakespeare Manual*, p. 154.

They are things indifferent, whether kept or broken;
Mere venial slips that grow not near the conscience;
Nothing concerns those tender parts; they are trifles;
For, as I think, there was never man yet hoped for
Either constancy or secrecy from a woman,
Unless it were an ass ordained for sufferance."
(*Wild-Goose Chase*, ii. 1.)

That these peculiarities were deliberately adopted there can hardly be a doubt. We have already seen that in his pastoral drama he changed his style. There we have about 190 lines of blank verse with certainly not more than ten double endings, and with hardly any superfluous syllables in other parts of the verse. He could therefore write blank verse of the ordinary type, but for his plays generally he chose the form which, in his opinion, was best suited for dramatic expression. The readers of them cannot fail to observe how often, when the line might have closed on the tenth syllable, an additional word is thrown in, "sir," or "too," or "lady," which might well have been dispensed with but for the desire to give the verse its characteristic cadence. There is an evident effort to avoid solemnity and weight, to make the line less "mighty" and more flexible, to gain the peculiar effect of unevenness or want of premeditation and polish which the writer seems to have thought suitable to the dramatic verse. This is the very antithesis of the French rhyme system. No mouthing is possible, no rounding off of a description or sentiment; all must be abrupt and almost spasmodic, the outcome apparently of the moment, untrammelled as far as may be by metre, though metre of some kind there always is. It is an absolute breaking away from the rigidity of

the older style, which in general confined the verse strictly within its allotted ten syllables, and was perpetually upon the tragic stilts which it borrowed from Seneca. The quick and lively action of the later stage, with its easy assumption of the ordinary speech of gentlemen—a point in which Fletcher was considered, justly enough, to have surpassed Shakspere,—developed a metre which might not only support the serious dignity of tragedy, but also supply the place of prose in the lightest interchange of fashionable repartee.

The effect, however, which was thus aimed at would perhaps have been more satisfactorily attained but for another peculiarity of Fletcher's verse. For while breaking from the trammels in one respect, he remains bound by them, perhaps unconsciously, in another. The chains of the old rhyming couplet seem still to hang about him, as about the early writers of blank verse; not that he uses rhyme, for from that he is almost entirely free; but he still has the tendency to make pause at the end of the verse, and sometimes even to fall into couplets. Of this, as of the other characteristics mentioned, every page of his works will afford examples; a single passage will be sufficient for illustration here:—

"I adore the Maker of that sun and moon,
That gives those bodies light and influence,
That pointed out their paths, and taught their motions;
They are not so great as we; they are our servants,
Placed there to teach us time, to give us knowledge
Of when or how the swellings of the main are,
And their returns again; they are but our stewards,
To make the earth fat with their influence,
That she may bring forth her increase, and feed us;

Shall I fall from this faith to please a woman?
For her embraces bring my soul to ruin?
I looked you should have said, 'Make me a Christian,
Work that great cure;' for 'tis a great one, woman;
That labour truly to perform, that venture,
The crown of all great trial and the fairest;
I looked you should have wept and kneeled to beg it," etc.
(*Island Princess*, iv. 5.)

In this there is but one unstopped line, and only one decided pause which is not at the end of the verse. It would be hard to parallel such passages, even from the earliest plays of Shakspere.

One result of this tendency to pause at the end of the verse is naturally that the line does not often end upon a very light and insignificant word, a mere connecting particle or preposition, as is not seldom the case in Massinger and the late work of Shakspere. We shall hardly discover in Fletcher lines that end upon words like "and," "but," "or," "with," "that," etc., which in *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are often found at the end of the verse. Such endings as we have in the following (taken at random from *The Tempest*) are with the stopped line obviously impossible:—

"Some food we had and some fresh water, that
A noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,
Out of his charity—being then appointed
Master of this design—did give us; with
Rich garments, linens," etc. (i. 2.)

"This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious; but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead." (iii. 1.)

"Therefore my son i' the ooze is bedded; and
I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded." (iii. 3.)

Evidently here the pauses are arranged with a design of not marking the end of the verse, as in Fletcher they seem to serve the opposite purpose. But whatever may have been the design of Fletcher's system of stopped line, the effect is partly to produce a rather marked discontinuity; to divide one sentence from another more completely than would be done by the ordinary pause not coinciding with the end of the line; so that what is added afterwards, if more is added, seems like an afterthought tacked on to the already completed phrase, and the effect is that there is less appearance of premeditation and more of spontaneous development of thoughts from the circumstances of the moment. Impulses seem to work before the eyes of the spectators, the speakers correct themselves, explain by parentheses hastily thrown in, or add afterthoughts as they occur to the mind. In short, the expression of thought becomes less narrative and more dramatic; and to this general effect the pause at the end of line, as it is used by Fletcher, certainly contributes; though it involves also a tiresome monotony, and Shakspere in his later work attains the same end by the structure of his sentences and the variation of his pauses, without the rather marked rhythmical mannerism of Fletcher.*

It has been before hinted that Fletcher uses no prose in his undoubted works, and this in fact is one of his distinguishing marks as compared with most dramatists of his time. No prose, unless it be an occasional pro-

* It is remarked by Darley that Fletcher has a tendency to pause on the uneven syllables of his verse, the third, fifth, or seventh.

clamation or epistle, is found in any play attributed without dispute to Fletcher alone, and only in one of the whole series which was written after Beaumont's death, that one being a joint production with Rowley. His verse was a sufficiently flexible instrument to serve all turns: the old blank verse would have been mere burlesque in the lighter scenes of comedy, and accordingly the older dramatists, including Shakspere, resorted in such scenes to prose; but Fletcher's verse was equal to all his requirements. Massinger, whose verse is in some respects even more free, observes also the rule of admitting no prose, the few prose passages which occur in his plays being apparently interpolated. At the same time, the rule that Fletcher admits no prose ought to be used very cautiously as a test for his earlier work. It is easier to suppose that he occasionally wrote prose than to seek for a second author in every scene which contains a few speeches not in verse.

Already it has been noted that with Fletcher, as with every one who deserves to be called a poet, metrical characteristics are an outgrowth of the matter, and of the general style of expression. Something therefore has already been said on the subject of style, in dealing with the structure of his verse, and what has now to be said of the structure of his sentences is little more than a development of what was there indicated. The distinction between the periodic or rounded style of speech, and its opposite, which may perhaps be called the disjointed style, is familiar enough, and of fundamental importance. Which of the two is the more dramatic does not admit

of question: and while Shakspere worked his way slowly from the first to the second, Fletcher, coming at a rather later period of development, seems to have at once and naturally adopted the second. The two styles are not, of course, absolutely separated in any writing, but it will perhaps be admitted without difficulty that the presentation of complete images fully preconceived and worked out completely in detail is characteristic of Shakspere's earlier style, while in the later we find rather point added to point, each one as it comes being apparently suggested by that which has preceded it, the whole conveying the impression of thoughts uttered as they passed through the mind rather than of any elaborate composition. Compare, for example, in this respect the following passages, the first produced about the year 1596, the second about twelve or fourteen years later.

> "Give me the crown. Here, cousin,
> On this side my hand, and on that side thine.
> Now is this golden crown like a deep well,
> That owes two buckets, filling one another;
> The emptier ever dancing in the air,
> The other down, unseen, and full of water:
> That bucket down, and full of tears, am I,
> Drinking my griefs, while you mount up on high."
>
> (*Richard II.*, iv. 1.)

The style of this is characteristic of the speaker no doubt, but it is also characteristic of the writer at one stage of his development, as the following at another:—

> "Come, fellow, be thou honest;
> Do thou thy master's bidding; when thou see'st him
> A little witness my obedience: look!
> I draw the sword myself; take it; and hit
> The innocent mansion of my love, my heart;

Fear not; 'tis empty of all things but grief:
Thy master is not there: who was indeed
The riches of it: do his bidding; strike.
Thou may'st be valiant in a better cause,
But now thou seem'st a coward."

(*Cymbeline*, iii. 4.)

The last is evidently the dramatic style; thoughts are suggested successively, and accompanied by action; the sentences are short and disjointed. Fletcher, then, was undoubtedly right in discarding the periodic style as he had discarded the mouth-filling verse. But he gained rather ease than strength; for rapidity of movement and metaphorical conciseness are not weapons of which he is master. Notwithstanding the dramatic structure of his verse and of his language, he often from weakness moves slowly. The comparison with Shakspere is but a superficial one after all. Shakspere's unequalled rapidity of imagination makes him concise even to obscurity; more and more as he advances he abounds in metaphor, finding as it were no leisure to do more than indicate his comparisons; and this pregnant brevity carries with it quite extraordinary force. Fletcher, on the other hand, notwithstanding the extreme rapidity of action in his dramas, is naturally inclined to move slowly in his expression of thoughts. "He lays line upon line, making up one after the other, adding image to image so deliberately that we see where they join. Shakspere mingles everything, he runs line into line, embarrasses sentences and metaphors; before one idea has burst its shell, another is hatched and clamorous for disclosure."* But this very

* Lamb's *Specimens of the Dramatists*, second edition, p. 419.

quality, this absence of confusion and presentation of ideas in due succession and fully expressed, was likely perhaps to make Fletcher the more popular of the two upon the stage, as more intelligible to the "many-headed bench," and there is certainly no reason to be surprised at the statement of Dryden, fully supported by other evidence, that two of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were acted for one of Shakspere's or Jonson's. Nor is it at all inconsistent with this that two editions of Shakspere should have been printed for one of Beaumont and Fletcher; for even the modern appreciation of Shakspere is not founded chiefly upon stage representation.

As regards construction Fletcher too often seems to be of the opinion of Mr. Bayes, "What the devil does the plot signify except to bring in fine things?" The plots of his plays are often very loosely put together; sometimes scenes are thrown in without any sufficient connection with the main course of the story—as for instance the madhouse scenes in *The Pilgrim;* and sometimes two stories are pursued in one play without closer connecting links than are supplied by some accident of locality or relationship—this is the case in *The Custom of the Country*, and several others. There is wanting that unity of idea which in Shakspere fuses together the most various forms of life into a harmonious whole—the first necessity for the romantic drama if it is not only to "hold the mirror up to nature," but also to rise to the level of art. There is wanting too often in Fletcher the artistic earnestness which aims steadily at a single end, and disregards merely temporary or partial success.

He is content to produce a series of effective situations; and the tradition of his method mentioned by Langbaine, is either true or well invented—"I have either read or been informed that it was generally Mr. Fletcher's practice, after he had finished three acts of a play to show them to the actors, and after they had agreed upon terms, he huddled up the two last without that proper care which was requisite." * Some such theory would account for the phenomena observed in such plays as *The Custom of the Country*, *The Pilgrim* or *The Chances;* and strikingly also in some of which Fletcher was perhaps not the sole author, though largely concerned—for example *The Little French Lawyer.* From this striving after immediate and startling effect springs a tendency to violent situations, and a fondness for the representation of extreme physical agony, as in *Valentinian* and *A Wife for a Month*, where we find scenes of this kind which resemble one another in other respects, and also in their disregard for the maxim that stage representation should not go beyond the point to which the sympathizing imagination of the audience can reach, and that therefore violent bodily pain is generally an unfit subject for the dramatist.

It is not however only in artistic but also in moral earnestness that Fletcher is found wanting. He is capable of representing exalted virtue and heroic chastity; we find no fault with the morality of Arnoldo, Armusia and Valerio, among his men, still less with Zenobia, Lucina and Evanthe, among his women; nor need we greatly complain of the odious exhibitions of vice in a

* *English Poets*, p. 144.

Hippolyta or a Frederick, though we might wish that to such as these severity had been more strictly dealt out. But it is to be remarked that most of Fletcher's gentlemen and men of honour, persons in whom we are meant to be interested, Mirabel, Monsieur Thomas, Don John, and in fact his characters of comedy generally, are open profligates in their relations to women. He "understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better than Shakespeare," says Dryden; and if the points which characterize a gentleman are as he seems to suggest, "wild debaucheries and quickness of wit in repartee," he is certainly right in his judgment. But one whose morality is justly suspected in comedy can hardly be trusted on the same point in more serious essays, and for all the superhuman virtue of Fletcher's heroines, we cannot but doubt whether the atmosphere in which they live is altogether healthy; whether there be not something overstrained and unnatural even in their virtues, from lack of knowledge in their creator regarding the simple and natural workings of true modesty and chastity.

But in fact it is in comedy that his real strength lies. Here alone he is truly original and the founder of a school destined to have a remarkable further development. He is in fact the father of the polite comedy of the next generation but one. From him is traced the spiritual descent of Wycherly, Congreve and Vanbrugh, and both the wit and the morality of the descendants find their prototype in the author of *The Spanish Curate* and *Wit without Money*.*

* This harmony of Fletcher with the prevailing tendencies accounts no doubt for his great popularity upon the stage in the years after his death.

IV.

WE have now perhaps reached a point of view from which we may hope to recognize the hand of Fletcher in those works of which he seems not to have been the sole author. As regards the work which was produced before the death of Beaumont we have evidence, as already stated, that each of the partners worked separately at times during this period, and that one of them had occasionally partners other than his most intimate friend. But, unless *The Two Noble Kinsmen* be an exception, no work of this period in which others besides Beaumont and Fletcher were concerned seems to have found its way into the collected editions. By examining, then, in chronological order, those earlier plays of which the date is most clearly ascertained, we may hope to trace the characteristics of Beaumont, as we have already found those of Fletcher, by examining the later work of which he seems to be the sole author.

First in order of publication is *The Woman Hater*, printed in 1607. Here, on the question of authorship, we shall have the misfortune to come into direct conflict with one of the few pieces of external evidence which can be alleged in making division between the two

authors. Langbaine, as has been already stated, writing in the year 1691, asserts that "this play was one of those writ by Fletcher alone." The first quarto mentions no author: the second, printed in 1648, has the name of Fletcher alone; and the third 1649, practically a reprint of the second with a new titlepage, has both names. It seems possible that Langbaine may have made his statement on the authority of the second quarto alone. How little he is likely to have had independent information of any value on this subject, may be judged from the fact that, of fifty-two plays which he notices under the names of Beaumont and Fletcher, only in the case of three others beside this has he a word to say about the authorship. One of these is *The Faithful Shepherdess*, about the authorship of which there has never been any doubt; the others are *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which, following the quarto of 1634, he ascribes to Fletcher and Shakspere, and *The Woman's Prize*, which is put down to Fletcher. As an illustration of the accuracy of his observations generally, we may notice what he says of *Love's Pilgrimage*, which he apparently thinks was the work of both authors though it was certainly written long after Beaumont's death. He suggests that the scene in that play which occurs also in Ben Jonson's *New Inn*, was probably taken by the authors with Jonson's consent on the failure of *The New Inn*, which play we know was not produced till 1629, when Fletcher had been dead four years and Beaumont thirteen! *

* The scene no doubt was introduced into *Love's Pilgrimage* on the occasion of some later revival of that comedy. Langbaine also thought

Finally, he includes, without remark, among the plays of our authors *The Coronation*, which was printed as Fletcher's in 1640, and also included in the folio of 1679, but was claimed by Shirley, in 1653, as his own production "falsely ascribed to Fletcher," an assertion which there is no reason whatever to doubt.

On a question of authorship, then, we may perhaps disregard the evidence of Langbaine without much scruple, but at the same time we may admit that the internal evidence to which we appeal, confirms his statement thus far, that it bears witness of one author rather than of two. The work seems to be quite homogeneous, and the prologue, which is certainly by the author of the play, speaks distinctly of a single writer; *e.g.* "he that made this play means to please auditors so as he may be an auditor himself hereafter," etc.; but at the same time it has not, so far as we can judge, a single characteristic of Fletcher. Fletcher, so far as we know him apart, never uses prose: this play has prose in every scene. Fletcher's blank verse has, as we have seen, an unmistakable character: the blank verse in this play has nothing of that character, but rather an opposite one of its own. Fletcher does not, so far as we know him apart, deal at all in burlesque: *The Woman Hater* has more burlesque than any other play in this collection, except *The Knight of the Burning Pestle.* When we come to the question of positive evidence, we must take into account the "religion" used by Beaumont to Ben

that *The Staple of News*, produced in 1625, was imitated in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle.*

Jonson, and the strong resemblances to Jonson in this play. No other author of the time has a quite similar mixture of prose and verse; and the resemblance in style of characters is obvious enough. Gondarino and Lazarillo are both characters, or rather caricatures, of the Jonsonian type. They are, in fact, personified "humours,"* —the one has no characteristic except his hatred of women, and the other none except his love of eating. There can be no question from whom this trick of characterization was caught; and though perhaps the most striking parallel in Jonson's works is to be found in one published after this date, *The Silent Woman*, the tendency had been visible enough from the first to be imitated. Then, again, in the occasional observations on men and things in *The Woman Hater* there is a vein of satire which reminds us of the elder poet; *e.g.*—

"In my conscience she went forth with no dishonest intent; for she did not pretend going to any sermon in the further end of the city; neither went she to see any odd old gentlewoman, that mourns for the death of her husband or the loss of her friend, and must have young ladies

---

* The word is thus explained by Jonson in the Induction to *Every Man out of his Humour*:—

"So in every human body,
The choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood,
By reason that they flow continually
In some one part, and are not continent,
Receive the name of humours. Now thus far
It may, by metaphor, apply itself
Unto the general disposition:
As when some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits and his powers
In their confluxions all to run one way,
This may be truly said to be a humour."

come and comfort her . . . . 'Twas no set meeting certainly, for there was no waferwoman with her these three days, on my knowledge." *

There seems also to be some evidence that Beaumont did write at the beginning of his career both without Fletcher and under Jonson's influence, for in the epistle to Jonson published in the folios as "written before he and Master Fletcher came to London, with two of the precedent comedies not yet finished" (though the evidence of the title is probably not worth much) he speaks of "scenes" upon which he is engaged—

> "Ben, when these scenes are perfect we'll take wine;
> I'll drink thy Muse's health, thou shalt quaff mine."

And that he was not then in co-operation with any one is made pretty clear by the melancholy description of his lonely state; while at the same time he makes acknowledgment of owing all he has to Jonson.

Moreover, the contempt of the "twopenny gallery," and of the popular tricks and personalities of the stage, which is expressed in the prologue to *The Woman Hater*, may fairly be compared with the temper of Beaumont's lines to Fletcher on *The Faithful Shepherdess*:—

> "Why should the man, whose wit ne'er had a stain,
> Upon the public stage present his vein,
> And make a thousand men in judgment sit,
> To call in question his undoubted wit,
> Scarce two of which can understand the laws
> Which they should judge by, nor the party's cause?
> * * * * *
> Nor want there those, who, as the boy doth dance
> Between the acts, will censure the whole play;
> Some like, if the wax lights be new that day;

* *Woman Hater*, ii. 1. See also Valerio's speeches throughout.

> But multitudes there are, whose judgment goes
> Headlong according to the actor's clothes.
> For this, these public things and I agree
> So ill, that, but to do a right to thee,
> I had not been persuaded to have hurled
> These few ill-spoken lines into the world;
> Both to be read and censured of by those
> Whose very reading makes verse senseless prose."

This contempt of the vulgar is also, it need hardly be said, characteristic of Ben Jonson, and is strongly expressed in the verses addressed to him by Beaumont shortly before the date of this play, on his comedy of *Volpone.*

As regards the burlesque element which is so marked a feature of *The Woman Hater*, it is important to observe that a strong touch of the same is to be found in *The Triumph of Honour* (the first of the *Four Plays in One*), which is perhaps more generally allowed to be the work of Beaumont than any other part of the jointly composed dramas. On the whole we are justified in assuming that this, at least, is one of the marks of Beaumont as distinguished from his partner, and that it should be so is not difficult to believe. The true burlesque or mock heroic, a perfectly legitimate weapon of the satirist when used to make absurdity more laughable and not to bring down noble and serious things to the level of a vulgar taste, uses naturally the grand as distinguished from the familiar style of expression; accordingly Fletcher, the master of the latter style, is the last person from whom we should expect the burlesque, which delights in sonorous lines and flowing periods. That in

act, is the form of humour appropriate to the graver ragic genius, by which however it must be handled with :aution, being perhaps the most difficult of all literary :endencies to confine within due limits. We find hardly a touch of it in any of the work which we have attributed to Fletcher alone, while of that which was produced during the lifetime of the younger poet it is almost always a noticeable feature.

Finally, we may observe, as one of the characteristics of the writer of this play, a decided tendency to imitate Shakspere. Jonson may have been his personal friend and his acknowledged master, but he is deeply imbued also with the unacknowledged influence of Shakspere; and here, again, we shall perhaps recognize a note of distinction between the two partners. Shakspere is occasionally parodied by both, and there is some evidence that Fletcher and Shakspere worked together, but no one would now call Fletcher Shaksperian in any sense of the word,* while throughout the work which we shall find reason to assign to Beaumont echoes and reminiscences of Shakspere seem constantly to sound in our ears. In *The Woman Hater* we have at least one case of burlesque application :—

> "*Laz.* Speak, I am bound to hear.
> *Val.* So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear."

And possibly Lazarillo's speech (ii. 1)—

> "Full eight-and-twenty several almanacks
> Have been compilèd, all for several years,

* The old notion however was that it was Fletcher who imitated Shakspere; and Dryden goes so far as to say that he has but one character not borrowed from this source.

Since first I drew this breath; four 'prenticeships
Have I most truly servèd in this world;
And eight-and-twenty times has Phœbus' car
Run out his yearly course, since——"

may contain a reference to Helena's in *All's Well that Ends Well* (ii. 1)—

"Ere twice the horses of the sun shall bring
Their fiery torcher his diurnal ring;
Ere twice in murk and occidental damp
Moist Hesperus hath quenched his sleepy lamp;
Or four and twenty times the pilot's glass
Hath told the thievish minutes how they pass"—

and if this be so, there is a rather unnecessary sneer in the saying of Lucio upon Lazarillo, "How like an ignorant poet he talks!" But there are also in this play several passages of more or less obvious imitation. Of these the most unquestionable is in the scene of the Intelligencers (iii. 2), as compared with the proceedings of Dogberry's watch in *Much Ado about Nothing*:—

"*Laz.* Then am I greater than the Duke!

2 *Int.* There, there's a notable piece of treason! Greater than the Duke; mark that!"

Again—

Laz. "But might I once attain the dish itself,
Tho' I cut out my means thro' sword and fire,
Thro' poison, thro' anything that may make good
My hopes——

2 *Int.* Thanks to the gods, and our officiousness, the plot's discovered! fire, steel and poison; burn the palace, kill the Duke, and poison his privy council."

The reader may also be reminded of Shakspere in other passages; *e.g.* (iii. 1):—

"Look on these cheeks
They have yet enough of nature, true complexion;
If to be red and white, a forehead high,

An easy melting lip, a speaking eye, . . .
If these may hope to please, look here!"

compare *Twelfth Night*, i. 5.

Or again:

"There was a knight swore he would have had me if I would have lent him but forty shillings to have redeemed his cloak to go to church in" (ii. 2):

compare *Henry IV.*, part 1, i. 2.

And these are not the only passages where distant echoes of Shakspere seem to sound in our ears as we read this rather immature but undeniably amusing comedy.

A considerable interval of time separates the publication of this play from the date of the next Beaumont and Fletcher quarto. But it is probable that the next play to be produced on the stage (at an interval of about a year) was *Philaster*, which is not known to have been printed till 1620. Of this celebrated drama, "the loveliest though not the loftiest of tragic plays which we owe to the comrades or the successors of Shakespeare," * Dryden observes that it was the first which brought the authors into esteem, "for before that they had written two or three very unsuccessfully." And certainly it is no marvel that such a work, notwithstanding its defects of construction, should have brought the writer into esteem. *Philaster* is perhaps the most generally known of all these plays, and that chiefly because of its very high poetical merits, by reason of which it

* A. C. S. in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th ed., article *Beaumont and Fletcher*.

lends itself to the purpose of the compiler of "Beauties of Beaumont and Fletcher," or whatever the title may be under which the public prefers to receive its scraps; but it has also undoubtedly high merit of a genuinely dramatic kind.

This play has been universally considered to be one in which both our authors took part; that was of course the opinion of Dryden; and although Earle's commendatory verses (which are perhaps a better authority on such a question than most compositions of the kind) speak of *Philaster* as the peculiar property of Beaumont, yet it must be noted that they deal in the same way with *The Maid's Tragedy*, in which undoubtedly Fletcher took part. Nevertheless, paradox though it may be, it must be confessed that in this play too it is impossible to find any mark of Fletcher. The style of *Philaster* seems to the present writer to be uniform throughout, and, if what has been said of Fletcher's characteristics is well founded, that style is not his. Not overmuch ought to be built upon the fact that prose occurs frequently, for it is *possible* that he may have used it at first, though there is no known instance of his having done so; and it is possible also that he may have written with his partner in some scenes, though we shall perhaps have reason hereafter to think that this was not his usual practice, nor does it seem to have been the practice of the other dramatists of the time who co-operated with one another in plays. But it is impossible to believe that the style of versification which appears within two years (perhaps within one year) fully formed in *The Maid's Tragedy*

should have been at this time quite imperceptible in his work; and the amount of verse in *Philaster* which, according to the canons which we have adopted, can by possibility be assigned to Fletcher is so small, that it is difficult to imagine co-operation on such terms at all, especially when we remember that Fletcher was decidedly the elder of the two. On the whole it seems preferable to disregard tradition and the authority of the quartos, as we have already done in the case of *The Woman Hater.*

There can hardly be much hesitation about the first four acts, in which we may fairly challenge criticism to produce a single passage which metrically resembles the style of Fletcher.*

* There is a passage in act iv. scene 4—

> "Place me, some god, upon a piramis
> Higher than hills of earth, and lend a voice
> Loud as your thunder to me, that from thence
> I may discourse to all the under-world
> The worth that dwells in him!"

which in expression is somewhat similar to two others by Fletcher, one in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, iv. 2—

> "Fame and Honour,
> Methinks, from hence, as from a promontory
> Pointed in heaven, should clap their wings, and sing
> To all the under-world the loves and fights, etc.;"

and the other in *Bonduca*, iii. 2—

> "Loud Fame calls ye,
> Pitched on the topless Apennine, and blows
> To all the under-world, all nations, etc.;"

as there is also a line in act v. scene 2—

> "All your better deeds
> Shall be in water writ, but this in marble,"

As regard the fifth act it would be perhaps possible to ascribe to Fletcher a part of the third and fourth scenes, and this Mr. Fleay seems inclined to do; but the only real difference here seems to be that there is occasionally a somewhat larger number of double endings than usual — a number which exceeds the average of Beaumont, though not attaining to that of Fletcher; but for some of these the burlesque style of the citizen-captain is reason good enough, and unless we found much more unmistakable traces of Fletcher than these, we should not be justified in supposing that he contributed only such a very insignificant share. It seems almost necessary therefore to assign this play to a single writer, and in doing so we shall not after all run counter to any very trustworthy external evidence; for setting aside commendatory verses, the only evidence which can by any stretch of language be called contemporary is that of the editions of 1620 and 1622, which have upon their titlepages the names of both the dramatists. These were published some years after Beaumont's death, when Fletcher was in the height of his stage popularity, and the publishers would not lightly miss the opportunity of using his name; while Fletcher himself, considering

which closely resembles one in that part of *Henry VIII.* which is commonly assigned to Fletcher—

> "Men's evil manners live in brass, their virtues
> We write in water."

But the sentiment of this last is familiar enough, and occurs for example in Antony's speech over Cæsar, while the form of expression is classical. Both the parallels cited seem to be explicable in other ways than by supposing identity of authorship, and the first passage quoted from *Philaster* as little resembles Fletcher in versification as any in the play.

the general indifference which prevailed about the authorship of stage plays, would hardly think it necessary to disclaim co-operation in one particular drama with the partner whose labours he had usually shared. In any case, it is certain that neither he nor any other friend of the author was consulted in the publication of the first edition, for it is printed from an incomplete manuscript in which missing portions are supplied by another writer. It is not likely that those who had so little respect for the text would have had much more regard for the rights of authorship.*

If the above judgment is correct, we have now an opportunity of estimating the style of Beaumont in a serious drama of very high excellence; and we shall at once notice again that his work is pervaded by the influence of Shakspere. Besides the general parallel which may be drawn between the character of Philaster and that of Hamlet, and the situation of Bellario and that of Viola, the following particular passages will readily suggest Shaksperian parallels either in matter or style—parallels which are not generally very close in language, but suggest by their resemblances of thought and expression the unconscious imitation, which is the natural homage of one original genius to another, of a

* *Cupid's Revenge* has been generally (and rightly) regarded as a joint composition, yet the first quarto assigns it to Fletcher alone, and this edition was printed in 1615, during the lifetime of both the authors. The printer in his "Address to the Reader," admits that he is "not acquainted" with the author; and in fact few of the dramatists, except Jonson, seem to have taken any care about their works when once they were disposed of to the actors: and these last were naturally adverse to the publication of plays.

Beaumont to a Shakspere. The plays which have produced the deepest impression upon him are apparently *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night.*

Act i. scene 1 :—

"Mark but the king, how pale he looks with fear!
Oh this same whoreson conscience, how it jades us!"

Act i. scene 2 :—

"*Are.* Will Philaster come?
Lady. Dear madam, you were wont to credit me
At first.
Are. But didst thou tell me so?
I am forgetful, and my woman's strength
Is so o'ercharged with dangers like to grow
About my marriage, that these under-things
Dare not abide in such a troubled sea.
How looked he, when he told thee he would come?
* * * * *
Alas! thy ignorance
Lets thee not see the crosses of our births;
Nature, that loves not to be questioned
Why she did this or that, but has her ends,
And knows she does well, never gave the world
Two things so opposite, so contrary,
As he and I am."

Act i. scene 2 (Arethusa confessing her love to Philaster) :—

"The words are such
I have to say, and do so ill beseem
The mouth of woman, that I wish them said,
And yet am loath to speak them."

Act ii. scene 3 (Arethusa to Euphrasia disguised as a page) :—

"Alas! what kind of grief can thy years know? . . .
Thy brows and cheeks are smooth as waters be,
When no breath troubles them: believe me, boy,

Care seeks out wrinkled brows and hollow eyes,
And builds himself caves, to abide in them."

Act ii. scene 3 (Bellario describing Philaster's love to Arethusa):—

"If it be love
To forget all respect of his own friends,
In thinking of your face; if it be love
To sit cross-armed, and sigh away the day,
Mingled with starts, . . .
If it be love to weep himself away,
When he but hears of any lady dead
Or killed, because it might have been your chance;
If when he goes to rest (which will not be),
Twixt every prayer he says, to name you once,
As others drop a bead, be to be in love,
Then, madam, I dare swear he loves you."

Act ii. scene 4 (the king on his usurpation):—

"You gods, I see that who unrighteously
Holds wealth or state from others, shall be cursed
In that which meaner men are blest withal: . . .
How can I
Look to be heard of gods that must be just,
Praying upon the ground I hold by wrong?"

Act ii. scene 4 (Dion reporting his reception at Megra's house):—

"Sir, I have asked and her women swear she is within; but they I think are bawds; I told 'em, I must speak with her; they laughed and said, their lady lay speechless. I said, my business was important; they said, their lady was about it: I grew hot, and cried, my business was a matter that concerned life and death; they answered, so was sleeping, at which their lady was. . . . In short, sir, I think she is not there."

Act iv. scene 2 (Philaster):—

"Oh, that I had been nourished in these woods,
With milk of goats and acorns, and not known
The right of crowns, nor the dissembling trains
Of women's looks!"

It is hardly worth while to multiply quotations further. Enough have been given to make it tolerably certain that the writer of *Philaster* had recollections floating in his mind of *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night* at least, if of no other Shaksperian plays. On the whole it may be said that the author, in climbing to the higher paths of the romantic and poetical drama, abandons the guidance of Jonson, and recognizes more exclusively the authority of him who rules the regions in which he now essays to walk.

In these paths *Philaster* is a first essay, and, as might have been expected, there is visible in it the immaturity of the youthful poet. It is indeed to this that we probably owe those poetical passages which so much delight us as extracts, but are less suitable, as the author himself soon saw, for the stage. It is indeed a permanent characteristic of Beaumont that he delights to present a poetical picture to his hearers. Even in *The Woman Hater* we had the picture of Andromeda chained to the rock, and in *Philaster* this characteristic is more marked than anywhere else. One example, Philaster's description of his first meeting with Bellario, is too well known to be quoted, and may be passed by with the single remark that its introduction in the place where it stands is certainly inopportune, however desirable it may be from the point of view of the dramatist, to create interest in Bellario. As other examples of this picturesque quality, we may select, first, Bellario's account of his own fortunes :—

> "It pleased her to receive
> Me as her page, and, when my fortunes ebbed,

That men strid o'er them careless, she did shower
Her welcome graces on me, and did swell
My fortunes, till they overflowed their banks,
Threatening the men that crossed 'em ; when, as swift
As storms arise at sea, she turned her eyes
To burning suns upon me, and did dry
The streams she had bestowed; leaving me worse
And more contemned than other little brooks,
Because I had been great." (iv. 4.)

Next, the description of the love of Philaster and Arethusa :—

"These two fair cedar-branches,
The noblest of the mountain where they grew,
Straightest and tallest, under whose still shades
The worthier beasts have made their lairs, and slept
Free from fervour of the Sirian star,
And the fell thunderstroke, free from the clouds,
When they were big with humour, and delivered
In thousand spouts their issues to the earth :
Oh, there was none but silent quiet there !
Till never-pleasèd Fortune shot up shrubs,
Base under-brambles, to divorce these branches ;
And for a while they did so, and did reign
Over the mountain, and choke up his beauty
With brakes, rude thorns and thistles, till the sun
Scorched them even to the roots, and dried them there :
And now a gentle gale hath blown again,
That made these branches meet and twine together,
Never to be divided." (v. 3.)

And, finally, the picture of the first sight of Philaster by Euphrasia :—

"Till, sitting in my window,
Printing my thoughts in lawn, I saw a god,
I thought, (but it was you), enter our gates :
My blood flew out and back again, as fast
As I had puffed it forth, and sucked it in
Like breath." (v. 5.)

These passages, and others like them, show the poet

more than the dramatist, and a similar mark of immaturity appears in the squandering of some needlessly beautiful lines upon the essentially ugly relations of Pharamond and Megra.

Moreover, defects in the plot may be easily found. Why, for instance, does not Bellario discover himself at the end of the third act, unless because the discovery was required by the dramatist at the end of the fifth? How is it consistent or natural that Philaster should wound Bellario merely to save himself? And, finally, how can we be satisfied with the untoward arrangement that brings the play to its conclusion, by which Euphrasia survives after the discovery of herself and of her love, to live with and serve the lady to whom Philaster is married? It may be added that the calumnious falsehood of Dion, from which all the mischief springs, is both too lightly uttered and too easily forgiven.

The versification of *Philaster* is a complete contrast to that which has been described as Fletcher's. It is marked generally by a serious and stately character, recalling the older style by its comparative freedom from redundancy, though unrestricted freedom is used of running on from verse to verse, points in which Fletcher's practice is exactly the reverse. It is not, however, the use of the writer, nor would it be consistent with the dignity of his verse, to end the line often upon a weak syllable; and, generally speaking, the verse has much resemblance to that of Shakspere in his first period. The tendency is to the periodic structure of sentence, and often we remark a rounded melody of cadence in

the more rhetorical passages, which belongs peculiarly to this writer. For example, in the challenge of Philaster to Pharamond :—

> "Having myself about me and my sword,
> The souls of all my name and memories,
> These arms and some few friends beside the gods." (i. 1) ;

in the description of Bellario at the fountain :—

> "Leaving him to the mercy of the fields,
> Which gave him roots ; and of the crystal springs,
> Which did not stop their courses ; and the sun,
> Which still, he thanked him, yielded him his light." (i. 2) ;

and in the conclusion of Bellario's prayer in parting from his master :—

> "And Heaven hate those you curse, though I be one."

Something of the same effect is aimed at in such balanced sentences as these :—

> "I am what I desire to be, your friend :
> I am what I was born to be, your prince." (v. 4) ;

and, again—

> "That every man shall be his prince himself
> And his own law ; yet I his prince and law."

Occasionally rhyme is introduced, chiefly at the end of scenes, but elsewhere no particular pains seem to be taken to avoid it, *e.g.* in Philaster's praise of a country life—

> "Where I, my fire, my cattle and my bed,
> Might have been shut together in one shed ;" (iv. 2.)

For that which requires not dignified expression, that which is neither heroic nor mock-heroic, prose is the vehicle adopted by Beaumont. And herein, as in almost all the characteristics above mentioned, he differs abso-

lutely from Fletcher, whose writing is nearly if not quite always in verse, who seems studiously to avoid the rounded and rhetorical cadence, and who hardly ever uses antithetical expression or rhyme.

Probably in 1609 appeared the drama which is generally regarded as the finest of the whole series, and is the only one which has lately been represented upon the stage—*The Maid's Tragedy*. It is here that we find the first certain indications of partnership: but it is evidently the younger writer who admits the elder into his fellowship, his own fame having been established by *Philaster*. This we should infer from the fact that to him apparently belongs the whole construction of the plot (a point in which internal evidence is confirmed by tradition), and by much the larger number of the scenes, though Fletcher's share is by no means unimportant in substance. To Beaumont belongs, almost without a doubt, the whole of the first three acts. Equally certain is it that the very important scene with which the fourth act opens, containing Evadne's terrified repentance, which presents on the whole the most striking situation of the play, is either wholly or chiefly by Fletcher. In the fifth act again, it is Fletcher who kills the king,* and to him perhaps belong the second and third scenes of this act; while in the fourth, Beaumont takes his place.

The only passage in the first three acts about which

* Compare, for Fletcher's style in killing, *Four Plays in One: Triumph of Death* (scene 5).

there can be much controversy is the last scene of the second act, which has more than the usual proportion of double endings, but in other respects seems to be strongly characteristic of Beaumont, as well in the structure of sentence and verse as in the picturesque and rhetorical elements, and the suggestions of Shaksperian influence. Take for example the following passage :—

> "*Asp.* Then, my good girls, be more than women, wise ;
> At least be more than I was ; and be sure
> You credit anything the light gives life to
> Before a man. Rather believe the sea
> Weeps for the ruined merchant, when he roars ;
> Rather, the wind courts but the pregnant sails,
> When the strong cordage cracks ; rather, the sun
> Comes but to kiss the fruit in wealthy autumn,
> When all falls blasted. If you needs must love,
> (Forced by ill fate,) take to your maiden bosoms
> Two dead-cold aspicks, and of them make lovers :
> They cannot flatter, nor forswear : one kiss
> Makes a long peace for all. But man——
> O that beast man ! Come, let's be sad, my girls !
> That down-cast of thine eye, Olympias,
> Shows a fine sorrow. Mark, Antiphila ;
> Just such another was the nymph Œnone,
> When Paris brought home Helen.—Now, a tear ;
> And then thou art a piece expressing fully
> The Carthage-queen, when from a cold sea-rock
> Full with her sorrow, she tied fast her eyes
> To the fair Trojan ships ;* and, having lost them,
> Just as thine eyes do, down stole a tear.—Antiphila,
> What would this wench do, if she were Aspatia ?
> Here she would stand, till some more pitying god
> Turned her to marble.—'Tis enough, my wench.—
> Shew me the piece of needlework you wrought.
> *Ant.* Of Ariadne, madam ?
> *Asp.* Yes, that piece.

* Cp. *Merchant of Venice*, iii. 2, 53, sq.

This should be Theseus; he has a cozening face.
You meant him for a man?" (ii. 2.)

It would be difficult to persuade any one who has the least acquaintance with Fletcher's style that this can be his. And the picture of Ariadne which follows, suggested perhaps by Shakspere,* but much more elaborately worked out, is not less characteristic. In short we recognize the author's hand throughout the scene, and the question of authorship would hardly have delayed us even for a moment, if Mr. Fleay had not been misled by the somewhat unusual number of double and triple endings in the scene; of which it may be remarked that a large proportion are occasioned by the long names.

Finally, in that part of the fourth act which chiefly belongs to Fletcher, there seem to be towards the end of the scene some indications of the other hand. Fletcher is there, but some passages have perhaps been interpolated by the other, to whom probably should be attributed the lines spoken by Amintor, "Thou hast brought me to that dull calamity," etc., and the last few lines of the scene with the concluding rhyme. But the opinion has already been expressed, and is justified by general observation, that these authors did not commonly work together in the same scene, and whether this be so or not, it may be admitted that the apportioning of scattered passages of the kind referred to above must be considered very uncertain work. One observation more may be made on this subject, namely that the prose of

* Cp. *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, v. 4, 171.

this play is not anywhere found in close neighbourhood with verse which has any resemblance to Fletcher's.

Of picturesque description one instance has already been referred to; to this may be added that of Aspatia's grief in the first scene of the play:—

> "But this lady
> Walks discontented, with her watery eyes
> Bent on the earth. The unfrequented woods
> Are her delight; where, when she sees a bank
> Stuck full of flowers, she with a sigh will tell
> Her servants what a pretty place it were
> To bury lovers in; and make her maids
> Pluck'em and strew her over like a corse."

Parallels with Shakspere occur constantly in Beaumont's portion of the play. The connection of the famous quarrelling scene of the third act with the quarrel of Brutus and Cassius has often been observed, but it is the general idea which is reproduced rather than any particular details. Of special passages which suggest imitation, conscious or unconscious, we may quote from Act i. scene 1:—

> "Victory sits on his sword;"

compared with—

> "Upon your sword sit laurel victory."
> (*Antony and Cleopatra*, i. 3.)

Act ii. scene 2:—

> "Like Sorrow's monument;"

compared with the expression—

> "Like Patience on a monument."
> (*Twelfth Night*, ii. 4.)

—the supposed situations being also similar.

Act iii. scene 1 :—

> "But there is
> Divinity about you that strikes dead
> My rising passions ; "

compared with—

> "There's such divinity doth hedge a king,
> That treason can but peep to what it would,"
> (*Hamlet*, iv. 5.)

Act iii. scene 2 :—

> "You do wrong us both :
> People hereafter shall not say there passed
> A bond, more than our loves, to tie our lives
> And deaths together ; '

compared with the passage in *Julius Cæsar*, ii. 1, where Brutus similarly rejects the idea of an oath between the conspirators.

Act v. scene 4 :—

> "Yet still, betwixt the reason and the act
> The wrong I to Aspatia did stands up : " etc. ;

compared with *Julius Cæsar*, ii. 1 :—

> "Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream."

The apparent Shaksperian parallel in Fletcher's portion of the play (Act. v. scene 1), where Evadne rejects the idea of killing the king in his sleep, is really a contrast rather than a parallel. Evadne will not "rock him into another world" without first awakening his conscience, while Hamlet rejects the moment when conscience is awakened, and will rather take his victim—

> "When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage."

A true parallel to the passage in *Hamlet* may be found

in the *Four Plays in One: Triumph of Death*, scene 5, which is also written by Fletcher.

On the whole, in reading this powerful tragedy we are impressed with the increasing hold obtained by Shakspere over the mind of the young and gifted writer to whom we have chiefly to ascribe it. Probably no one then living was so near akin to that unapproachable genius as the man who, at the age of twenty-three or little more, planned and for the most part produced this truly tragic work.

Before taking leave of the play which according to our hypothesis formed the opening of the celebrated partnership, it may not be amiss to set side by side, for the purpose of illustration, examples taken from it of the style of expression of each author. Let both be taken from scenes of altercation and strong emotion—the first from the quarrel of Melantius and Amintor, the second from the final scene between Evadne and her seducer.

Act iii. scene 2 (Beaumont):—

"*Mel.* Take, then, more
To raise thine anger: 'Tis mere cowardice
Makes thee not draw; and I will leave thee dead,
However. But if thou art so much pressed
With guilt and fear, as not to dare to fight,
I'll make thy memory loathed, and fix a scandal
Upon thy name for ever.
Am. Then I draw,
As justly as our magistrates their swords
To cut offenders off. I knew before
'Twould grate your ears; but it was base in you
To urge a weighty secret from your friend,
And then rage at it. I shall be at ease,
If I be killed; and, if you fall by me,
I shall not long out-live you.

Mel. Stay awhile—
The name of Friend is more than family,
Or all the world besides; I was a fool.
Thou searching human nature, that didst wake
To do me wrong, thou art inquisitive,
And thrust'st upon me questions that will take
My sleep away! Would I had died, ere known
This sad dishonour!—Pardon me, my friend.
If thou wilt strike, here is a faithful heart;
Pierce it, for I will never heave my hand
To thine. Behold the power thou hast in me!"

Act v. scene 2 (Fletcher):—

"*King.* How's this, Evadne?
Ev. I am not she; nor bear I in this breast
So much cold spirit to be called a woman:
I am a tiger; I am anything
That knows not pity. Stir not! If thou dost,
I'll take thee unprepared, thy fears upon thee,
That make thy sins look double; and so send thee
(By my revenge I will!) to look those torments
Prepared for such black souls.
King. Thou dost not mean this; 'tis impossible;
Thou art too sweet and gentle.
Ev. No, I am not.
I am as foul as thou art, and can number
As many such hells here. I was once fair,
Once I was lovely; not a blowing rose
More chastely sweet, till thou, thou, thou foul canker,
(Stir not) didst poison me. I was a world of virtue,
Till your cursed court and you (Hell bless you for it!)
With your temptations on temptations,
Made me give up mine honour; for which, King,
I am come to kill thee.
King. No!
Ev. I am.
King. Thou art not!
I prithee speak not these things: thou art gentle,
And wert not meant thus rugged.
Ev. Peace and hear me.
Stir nothing but your tongue, and that for mercy
To those above us."

In these two passages the main characteristics of the two writers are by no means exaggerated, yet they are clearly distinguishable, and in the latter the effect of the parentheses should be especially remarked.

Perhaps about the same time may have been produced the *Four Plays or Moral Representations in One*, of which the third has a killing scene closely resembling that of *The Maid's Tragedy*. We have no external evidence of its date, but it has been generally agreed by critics that the first two "Triumphs" are to be assigned to Beaumont, and the others to Fletcher. These miniature dramas are necessarily short and slightly constructed, and therefore not a sufficient basis for general observations on the style of the authors in larger works, but those assigned to Beaumont are noteworthy for examples of several of his chief characteristics. In both there is a considerable amount of rhyme, and in the first there is not a little of that burlesque vein which distinguishes him from most writers of the age. At the same time there is an obvious reminiscence of Ancient Pistol in the expressions of Corporal Nicodemus—

"Till Atropos do cut this simple thread,"

and such like. To this feature, however, we shall have occasion to refer again.

The Faithful Shepherdess was produced by Fletcher alone in 1610, but the protest which its reception called forth from Beaumont against submitting to the popular judgment the products of unstained wit, was not followed

by any remission of his own labours for the stage, of which perhaps the year 1611 was the culminating point. In that year came forth two masterpieces of very opposite kinds, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *A King and No King*.

The former was published in 1613 without author's name, by Walter Burre, who in the next year published Raleigh's *History of the World*. In his dedication he speaks of having kept the play for two years, and says that it was the elder of *Don Quixote* by more than a year, meaning apparently the English translation, published in 1612. As regards authorship, the publisher speaks of it first as a child exposed "by its parents," because he was so unlike his brethren, but afterwards more than once refers to its "father," as if one person only were concerned, *e.g.* "If it be slighted or traduced it hopes his father will beget him a younger brother who shall revenge his quarrel," etc. The "Address to the Reader" in the later edition of 1635 speaks of the "author," though the titlepage of that edition has both names. The expression "authors intention," in the prologue, is ambiguous for want of the apostrophe. From internal evidence we should be disposed to attribute the play to a single writer: and we can have little hesitation in ascribing it to that one of our authors of whom the mock-heroic style is characteristic. In *The Woman Hater* and in the *Four Plays in One* Beaumont had already written something in this vein: *e.g.*—

> "*Nic.* How long shall patience thus securely snore?
> Is it my fault, if these attractive eyes,

This budding chin, or rosy-coloured cheek,
This comely body, and this waxen leg,
Have drawn her into a fool's paradise?
By Cupid's godhead I do swear (no other),
She's chaster far than Lucrece, her grandmother;
Pure as glass window, ere the rider dash it,
Whiter than lady's smock, when she did wash it,—
For well thou wott'st (tho' now my heart's commandress)
I once was free, and she but the camp's laundress."

This is from *The Triumph of Honour*, Beaumont's undisputed work, where more of the same kind may be found, and these passages certainly cannot be distinguished in style from the utterances of Humphrey or Ralph in the plays before us. As regards the occasion of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, which was written, says the publisher, in eight days, and therefore probably for a special purpose, something will be said hereafter.

None of the works which we have to examine presents us with more difficult questions in regard to the authorship of its particular parts than *A King and No King*, which was first acted in 1611, but not printed until 1619. The difficulties are owing, perhaps, to the following reasons: first, it may be suspected that it has undergone a considerable amount of corruption; secondly, it is possible that in several scenes of this play the two authors worked together; and thirdly, some special characteristics of Beaumont are less marked now than they have hitherto been, and the metre and syntactical structure become our principal guides. This is due perhaps to the development of his dramatic faculty, which has caused him to prune his exuberances of poetry

and rhetoric, and so far to approximate to the style of his fellow-worker. The play is skilfully constructed, and though there are certainly reminiscences of Shakspere, —for example in the part of Bessus, which is drawn after Falstaff rather than Bobadil—yet on the whole it has more originality than either *Philaster* or *The Maid's Tragedy*. It must be understood that the separation of authors in this play is not made with absolute confidence, for the reasons stated above; but we shall probably be right in assigning to Beaumont, here as before, the first three acts, unless indeed the disarming of Bessus by Bacurius, in iii. 2, be Fletcher's, as suggested by the parallel scene in *Thierry and Theodoret*, ii. 3. Of the fourth act the first three scenes are mainly Fletcher's; but whether they originally contained any prose, and if so whether Fletcher was responsible for it, cannot easily be decided; in any case, the third scene is in verse which by its colloquial ease is decidedly characteristic of Fletcher. With the same reservations we may also assign to Fletcher the first and third scenes of the fifth act.

Cupid's Revenge was first acted on the Sunday after New-year's night, 1612. It was printed in 1615 with the name of Fletcher alone. This might, perhaps, have been thought evidence enough of his sole authorship, seeing that both writers were then alive, but the editors are unanimous in their opinion that it is a joint production, and of this the internal evidence is no less than conclusive.

In the management of its opening scene it resembles the other plays of the same class which preceded it; and

the first scene, from the entrance to the exit of Leontius, has evidently the style of versification which belongs to Beaumont; the concluding part, which is practically a different scene, is Fletcher's, and also the second scene, which contains two lyrical passages, of which the first may be compared to the lyrics of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, and the second to the love-songs in *Valentinian*. In the remainder of the play we may assign to Beaumont Act i. scene 3, in which the speech of Hidaspes, "If it be jest," etc., recalls that of Bellario, already quoted from *Philaster*, "If it be love;" and the picturesque element appears in the descriptions of the deformed dwarf transformed by the imagination of his mistress, *e.g.*:—

> "He is like
> Nothing that we have seen, yet doth resemble
> Apollo, as I oft have fancied him,
> When rising from his bed he stirs himself,
> And shakes day from his hair."

To him also belongs Act i. scene 4, from the entrance to the exit of Hidaspes, and the first four scenes of the second act.

In the third, the first two scenes are Beaumont's: the rest of the act is certainly by Fletcher. Of the fourth act possibly the first scene, to the entrance of Timantus, may be Beaumont's, but the rest of the act must be attributed entirely, or almost entirely, to Fletcher. The rising of the citizens is quite in his style, but the lines in which Agenor describes the rescue of the prince may probably have been interpolated by his partner, of whom they are characteristic, both metri-

cally and also by the bold use of personification, which Fletcher rarely employs :—

> "His hour was come
> To lose his life : he, ready for the stroke,
> Nobly, and full of saintlike patience,
> Went with his guard ; which when the people saw,
> Compassion first went out, mingled with tears,
> That bred desires and whispers to each other,
> To do some worthy kindness for the prince ;
> And ere they understood well how to do,
> Fury stepped in, and taught them what to do,
> Thrusting on every hand to rescue him,
> As a white innocent : Then flew the roar,
> Thro' all the streets, of 'Save him, save him, save him !'
> And as they cried they did," etc. (iv. 4.)

The last act is also mainly Fletcher's ; possible exceptions are the first scene, and a portion of the fourth, from the entrance of Timantus to that of Ismenus.

It will be noticed that in this tragedy for the first time the work is equally divided, or nearly so, between the two authors. Hitherto the influence of one has been distinctly predominant, for the portion contributed by Fletcher to *The Maid's Tragedy* and *A King and No King* is inferior, in quantity at least, to the remainder. From this time, however, with some exceptions he increasingly takes the lead, and Beaumont falls into the background. Why, we can only guess. Possibly his marriage may have taken place about this time ; his partner, moreover, had doubtless become a more important person than formerly, and profiting both by his own reputation and that of his friend, was independently laying the foundation of that great popularity which Beaumont did not live to share. It must be added,

however, that the immediate result is a considerable loss of power and unity in the productions of the transition period. It seems, in short, to be in this instance a condition of the highest success that the influence of a single mind should decidedly predominate in each work.

There is, however, one more play, *The Scornful Lady*, a comedy of the first rank, in which Beaumont was probably the principal author. This was printed in 1616, bearing upon the titlepage the names of both authors; it may probably have been produced as early as 1612. The first two acts are almost wholly in prose, and although it is not proved that Fletcher wrote no prose in drama, yet it certainly seems that he used it but little. That, however, is not the only or the chief reason for attributing these acts to Beaumont. His style is visible also in the periodic structure of speeches, in the burlesque magniloquence of Sir Roger, of the roystering captain, and of the Lady herself when she ironically describes the dangers of her suitor's voyage, and finally in the elaborate characterization of Mistress Younglove in the conversation which opens the play, a mode of introduction which is much used by Beaumont for his minor personages: we may compare with this passage the description of the court ladies in the first scene of *Philaster*.

The third act presents greater difficulty. The first scene is Fletcher's and perhaps originally all in verse, though it has not been commonly so written by the editors. The second contains perhaps the work of both authors.

The fourth act apparently comes wholly from Fletcher, unless an exception be made in reference to the few lines of prose with which it begins; and in the fifth, the second scene only can with confidence be attributed to Beaumont. In the remaining scenes there is prose, but of such a kind as to raise suspicion that it may once have been verse; and in general, it may be remarked that the text of this play seems to have undergone considerable corruption, notwithstanding that it was printed in the lifetime of one of its authors. The same remarks apply to this case which were made on the first quarto of *Philaster*.

The ironical reference, in the prologue of Beaumont's earliest comedy, to the almost universal practice of laying the scene abroad, and introducing persons of title,* prepares us to find him soon breaking through the fashion; and *The Scornful Lady*, the only comedy of which the plan can be assigned to him in his maturity, stands in this respect in a somewhat peculiar position among its fellows. It is not of course the only play of this collection which lays its scene in England and presents untitled characters, but it conveys the reader more than any other into the centre of English domestic life. Fletcher excelled in the wit and repartee of fashionable gentlemen, and in his work we shall find no such characters as the domestic chaplain, the steward, and the waiting-woman of this comedy. We seem to gain a glimpse of a genuine English interior: the lady's house-

* "A duke there is, and the scene lies in Italy, as those two things lightly we never miss." (Prologue to *The Woman Hater*.)

hold is evidently taken from life, perhaps from the family establishment of Grace Dieu; "Sir, they are in tribes like Jews: the kitchen and dairy make one tribe, . . . the buttery and laundry are another, and there's no love lost." And the characters are all very realistically drawn, from the chaplain who is sent on errands by all the rest, and who takes the air "many mornings on foot, three or four miles, for eggs," to the waiting-woman who alternately scorns and adores him. The comedy is in short a storehouse for the historian of domestic manners, and we must lament that, owing to the early death of the principal author, this style had for the present no further development. Jonson, who might have excelled in it, chose to waste strength on more worthless enterprises.

The Coxcomb was acted in the year 1612; but not printed except in the folio editions. For the construction Fletcher seems to be responsible, and he is the author of considerably the larger part. The play is marked by a singular want of unity, arising from the use of two distinct plots, with no apparent connection between them except the occasional and accidental meeting of the two sets of characters with one another in general society. It is not difficult to effect a distribution of shares between the two authors on metrical grounds, which will correspond to a great extent with this division of the plot. To Beaumont belong the characters of Viola and Ricardo, that is to say, he is the author of most of the scenes in which they take the leading part—Act i. scene 4, the soliloquy of Viola on

leaving her father's house; Act i. scene 6; Act ii. scene 4, containing the repentance of Ricardo; Act iii. scene 3, and Act v. scene 2. Fletcher is the author of the whole of what, to judge from the title, we must call the main plot, as well as a certain amount of the other. The main plot is an absurd and rather disgusting story, with nothing to recommend it except the opportunities which it occasionally affords for amusing situations. All that is poetical and interesting in the play is contained in the underplot of Viola and Ricardo. Viola herself is a character of much delicacy and beauty, such as Fletcher, who can represent female heroism but not maiden modesty, was quite incapable of imagining. The character is not unworthy of Shakspere himself, and the rhythm of the verse in Beaumont's scenes is as Shaksperian as anything not written by Shakspere.

For comparison of the two styles in this play it will suffice to quote the first words which by each author are put into the mouth of Viola.

Act i. scene 1 (Fletcher):—

"*Viol.* Sweet speak softly;
For tho' the venture of your love to me
Meets with a willing and a full return,
Should it arrive unto my father's knowledge,
This were our last discourse.
Ric. How shall he know it?
Viol. His watching cares are such for my advancement,
That everywhere his eye is fixed upon me:
This night, that does afford us some small freedom,
At the request and much entreaty of
The mistress of the house, was hardly given me;
For I am never suffered to stir out,
But he hath spies upon me. Yet, I know not,—

You have so won upon me, that, could I think
You would love faithfully (tho' to entertain
Another thought of you would be my death),
I would adventure on his utmost anger."

Act i. scene 4 (Beaumont):—

"*Viol.* The night is terrible, and I enclosed
With that my virtue and myself hate most,
Darkness; yet must I fear that which I wish,
Some company; and every step I take
Sounds louder in my fearful ears to-night,
Than ever did the shrill and sacred bell
That rang me to my prayers. The house will rise
When I unlock the door. Were it by day,
I am bold enough, but then a thousand eyes
Warn me from going. Might not God have made
A time for envious prying folk to sleep,
Whilst lovers met, and yet the sun have shone?"

The Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn was exhibited in February, 1613, and printed probably in the same year; but the quarto edition has neither name of author nor date. It is ascribed to Beaumont in the folio editions. Unlike the masque in *The Maid's Tragedy* it is written in blank verse, and that of a somewhat more even and stately kind than we find in the dramas. It was no doubt sufficient for its purpose, though somewhat wanting in the commendations of the king and praise of the assembly, which are elsewhere suggested by the author as requisites of a masque.*

The Captain was acted certainly before May 20th, 1613, when John Hemmings and his company were paid

* *Maid's Tragedy*, i. 1.

for presenting this and five other plays at court. But Dyce remarks that the prologue, which seems to be written for the first representation, speaks of "twelve-pence" as admission-money, and therefore it was perhaps first acted at a public theatre. This prologue also speaks of a single author, and Dyce assigns the play to Fletcher alone. It seems, however, from the evidence of metre that one scene at least (Act iv. scene 5) is by a second writer; and, a co-operator being once admitted, we might with probability also assign to him a share in Act i. scene 2; Act ii. scene 2, which contains a song partly borrowed from *The Knight of the Burning Pestle;* and Act v. scenes 4 and 5, though there is perhaps nothing in these scenes which could not have been written by Fletcher. The metrical peculiarities of them are a scantiness of double endings, and a rather marked tendency in using such words as "affections," "handling," "courtier," "surgeon," "Indies," "studied," "patience," etc., to make as many syllables of them as possible. This is opposed to Fletcher's practice, but it is not a peculiarity which belongs to Beaumont, nor is there anything in the play which is specially characteristic of him. If, however, we assign to him the part which is not Fletcher's, we shall probably at least conclude that he had nothing to do with the construction. In this point the play is defective, especially in regard to the looseness with which the two plots hang together; but that is quite after the manner of Fletcher, and may be paralleled from *The Coxcomb*, written perhaps under similar circumstances, after the marriage of Beaumont, when the friends had ceased to live together.

Several reminiscences of Shakspere occur in Fletcher's part of it, but they are only superficial and do not indicate an author penetrated with Shaksperian influence; the turn of the phrase is reproduced rather than the thought; *e.g.*:—

Act ii. scene 1:—

"And how it was great pity, that it was." *

Act iii. scene 5:—

"This is somewhat
Too much, Fabricio, to your friend that loves you." †

Act iv. scene 2:—

"1 *Boy.* 'Faith, he lies drawing on apace.
2 *Boy.* That's an ill sign.
1 *Boy.* And fumbles with the pots too.
2 *Boy.* Then there's no way but one with him." ‡

This play then adds confirmation to the suggestion already made that about this time Beaumont considerably relaxed his efforts in connection with the stage; whether from ill-health or domestic concerns we can only conjecture; it is certain, however, that he died within three years, having then been married for some time.

To the tragedy of *Thierry and Theodoret* very various dates have been assigned. We have no evidence as to the time of its production beyond the fact that it was printed in 1621. This edition has no author's name. A second, in 1648, assigns the play to Fletcher alone, but

* Cf. *Henry IV.*, pt. 1, i. 3, 58. † *Julius Cæsar*, i. 2, 33.
‡ *Henry V.*, ii. 3. None of these passages are included in the interesting collection of Shakspere references published by the New Shakspere Society, *Shakspere's Centurie of Prayse*, by C. M. Ingleby.

the same republished in the next year with new title-page, prologue, and epilogue adds the name of Beaumont, and in this respect the play has precisely the same history as *The Woman Hater*. The question of authorship is rather difficult. The epilogue in the edition of 1649 speaks of "our poet," but it seems to be certain that there are two authors, and equally certain that of these Fletcher is one. To him belongs Act i. scene 1; Act ii. scenes 2, 3, and 4, the whole of Act iv. and Act v. scene 2. The rest may be Beaumont's, though his characteristics are less visible here than in most of his work. We see his hand most plainly in the conversation of Thierry and Brunhalt, and afterwards with his brother (Act ii. scene 1), and in the scene between Thierry and Ordella, with which the third act begins. His mark is set upon the king's expressions of contempt for his subjects' opinion (ii. 1):—

> "How! my subjects?
> What do you make of me? oh Heaven! my subjects?
> How base should I esteem the name of prince,
> If that poor dust were anything before
> The whirlwind of my absolute command!" etc.*

and we seem to recognize him in the chaste and poetical imaginings of Ordella, in the unconscious irony of "a temperance beyond hers that rocked me," uttered by a son of Brunhalt, and in the bold impersonations, *e.g.* Act iii. scene 2):—

> "Despair, which only in his love saw life
> Worthy of being, from a gardener's arms
> Snatched this unlucky brat, and called it mine."

* Compare this and what follows with the temper of Arbaces in *A King and No King*.

In the comedy of *Wit at Several Weapons* (for the date of which there is no evidence), we have no reason to doubt that Beaumont shared; but it is not possible to accept the opinion suggested by Mr. Fleay that his hand is visible in combination with Fletcher's throughout the play. In fact this theory of mixed work is but a loose and slovenly way of escape from difficulties. The maxim is first laid down that Fletcher has not less than a certain number of double endings, and if a scene falls below the supposed minimum in this respect, it is inferred that here he was in co-operation with another writer, though it may possess all the other marks of Fletcher, and though it may be impossible to draw a line of distinction between the parts assigned in it to each of the supposed authors. But it appears in fact that the scenes which we attribute to Fletcher while working with Beaumont are often much less marked by this wilful mannerism than his subsequent single work, while they have in full force all the other characteristics by which he is recognized. The following passage is a specimen of those which Mr. Fleay calls "mixed work," apparently because they have not their due proportion of double endings, and yet who could suppose that it was anything but pure Fletcher?

"I am persuaded thou devour'st more flouts
Than all thy body's worth, and still a-hungered!
A mischief of that maw! prithee, seek elsewhere;
In troth I'm weary of abusing thee:
Get thee a fresh mistress, thou't make work enough:
I do not think there's scorn enough in town
To serve thy turn, take the court ladies in,
And all their women to 'em, that exceed 'em!
Greg. Is this in earnest, lady?

Niece. Oh, unsatiable!
Dost thou count all this but an earnest yet?
I'd thought I'd paid thee all the whole sum, trust me,
Thou't beggar my derision utterly,
If thou stay'st longer; I shall want a laugh:
If I knew where to borrow a contempt
Would hold thee tack, stay and be hanged thou should'st then:
But thou hast no conscience now to extort hate from me,
When one has spent all she can make upon thee;
Must I begin to pay thee hire again,
After I've rid thee twice? faith 'tis unreasonable." (iii. 1.)

On the whole it is probable that the theory of mixed work should be adopted very cautiously, if at all, and only where it is possible to point out definitely the elements of the combination. It is not lightly to be supposed that such great and equal fellow-workers as these patched and tinkered one another's work as a Davenant or a Cibber improve Shakspere; and though doubtless we may find scenes in which both seem to have a hand, yet in these their work will be found separate, each to be traced by its own character, and not conspiring together to produce a nondescript result which has no character at all.

As regards this particular comedy the division of authors is not perhaps very easy, but it may be accomplished with some degree of probability without recourse to such a doubtful hypothesis as that of Mr. Fleay. To Fletcher belongs Act i. scene 1, and Act ii. scene 1, as well as the whole of Act iii. (which is nearly all in verse), and Act iv. scenes 2 and 3. The rest is probably Beaumont's, and in his portion of the second act there are passages which remind us of his former work. Pompey's qualified voucher for the character of the lady to whom

he had been sent, is not unlike that of Bessus for the virtuous behaviour of his charge, and the jest at the expense of the devices had at the *Red Bull* may be paralleled from *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, though it is likely enough that this was a commonplace of wit at the *Blackfriars*. The doubt which hangs over his share in this play seems to affect chiefly the less serious parts, and to be due to the limited means which we have of judging of his style of versification in the ordinary conversation of comedy. Hitherto he has generally used prose as his vehicle for this kind of expression. In this play, however, he seems to have partly fallen in with the new rule that comedy should be written in verse, and consequently writes in a style which is somewhat unusual to him.

The Honest Man's Fortune seems also to have been acted in 1613. The fifth act only is by Fletcher; the rest by another author, probably not Beaumont. It has none of the marked characteristics of his style; and with all its lofty sentiment and occasional vein of poetry the play is too poor in construction and character to be attributed mainly * to the author of *Philaster* and *The Maid's Tragedy*, while in the part of Veramour there is even a quip aimed at the device of playwrights which was made popular by the former play, of the poor disguised lady that like a page follows her master "for love God wot."

* If we admitted Beaumont here as the other author, we should have to assign to him no less than four acts out of five, a larger proportion than in any other jointly written play.

For *The Knight of Malta* there is no evidence of date beyond the fact that Burbadge acted a part in it, and consequently it must have been produced before March 13, 1619. It seems, however, to be a joint composition, and one in which Beaumont had a considerable share. Dyce, indeed, rejects this opinion, but without assigning any reason—indeed, he nowhere states the critical grounds upon which he proceeds in distinguishing the work of either dramatist. Evidently the first and the last acts are by one author, and the second, third and fourth by another, and it is not much less clear that the latter is Fletcher and the former Beaumont. The first act has all Beaumont's characteristics of versification and structure, the full flow of the lines and the periodic rounding of the sentences, while in poetical qualities as well as in dramatic force and interest it may be pronounced fully worthy of him. If the play as a whole misses the mark of highest excellence, this is certainly not the fault of the introductory scenes. It is worthy of remark, moreover, that the curious variation of name in the case of the Moor Zanthia or Abdella, is coincident with the division suggested by considerations of style: for, setting aside stage directions which are probably not original, the name used is Zanthia in the first act, and Abdella in the fourth. In the other acts neither name occurs in the text.*

* Mr. Fleay's theories about this play are not very intelligible. After first assigning to Beaumont what is attributed to him above, with the addition of the greater part of the third act, he has changed his mind in a later edition, and calls in Middleton to take Beaumont's place, apparently because he dared not after all attribute the third act to Beaumont, and he

We seem, then, to have found the hand of Beaumont in thirteen plays, and we shall find it in no other; nor are there many more in which his co-operation has been suggested by modern critics. Dyce assigns to him a share in *The Little French Lawyer*, but as usual without

would not assign it to Fletcher; while Middleton was regarded as a kind of neutral nondescript. It is difficult to imagine any careful reader giving the third and fourth acts to different writers, or the first and third to the same. What does Mr. Fleay think of the metre of the following passage, which he assigns to Middleton?

> "*Vel.* By all goodness
> You wrong my lady, and deserve her not,
> When you are at your best. Repent your rashness;
> 'Twill shew well in you.
> *Abd.* Do, and ask her pardon.
> *Ori.* No; I have lived too long, to have my faith,
> My tried faith, called in question, and by him
> That should know true affection is too tender
> To suffer an unkind touch, without ruin.
> Study ingratitude, all, from my example;
> For to be thankful now is to be false,
> But be it so; let me die; I see you wish it;
> Yet dead, for truth and pity's sake, report
> What weapon you made choice of when you killed me.
> *Vel.* She faints.
> *Abd.* What have you done?
> *Ori.* My last breath cannot
> Be better spent than to say I forgive you," etc.
>
> (*Knight of Malta*, iii. 2.)

Does it not remind him of Fletcher?

But this is not the only occasion on which Mr. Fleay has so misused Middleton. In his *Shakespeare Manual* he discusses the authorship of *Macbeth*, and after mentioning the theory that some of the witch scenes are by Middleton, he says, "The severely wounded captain in i. 2, who mangles his metre so painfully, I surrender at once to the Cambridge editors as Middleton's." He seems to forget that Middleton also has a style by which he may be recognized, and that not a trace of it appears in this scene. Let any one who doubts this, read Middleton, as the present writer has done, with this scene in his mind. No wonder that Mr. Fleay should add, "the whole of this Middleton theory requires reconsideration."

giving any reason, except that the prologue and epilogue speak of "writers" or "poets," and this argument is sufficiently met by the probable supposition that it was a joint production of Fletcher and Massinger. The excellent character of La Writ would certainly have run to burlesque in the hands of Beaumont, whose comedy was not specially marked by that "infinite ease, smartness and rapidity of dialogue" of which Dyce justly makes mention in connection with this play. It would be difficult, perhaps, to find in it a single characteristic of Beaumont; and the same may be said of *The Laws of Candy*, which, according to Dyce, is "generally reckoned, and perhaps rightly, among the joint compositions of Beaumont and Fletcher," though it has attached to it a list of the actors, in which Burbadge does not appear. On the other hand Dyce is no doubt right in supposing that *Bonduca* and *Valentinian* are the unassisted work of Fletcher.*

It is perhaps worth while to remark before leaving this subject, that of the thirteen plays in which Beaumont had a share only five were included in the so-called first folio of Beaumont and Fletcher, which professed to contain nothing that had been printed before.† This fact fully justifies the complaint of Aston Cockaine, that credit was assigned in that edition to Beaumont for work in which for the most part he had no share, and also

* *The Faithful Friends*, printed for the first time in the present century and unacknowledged by the editors of the folio editions, need hardly be considered a genuine work.

† As a matter of fact this boast was not entirely justified, for the edition included Beaumont's *Masque*, but in a rather incomplete form.

testifies to the much greater popularity of the plays in which he assisted, as compared with the rest; for of the former class eight out of thirteen had been separately published before 1647, of the latter eight out of nearly forty; and if we count the number of editions of the plays which had been published separately, the disproportion becomes even more striking. The total number of editions up to 1647 of plays in which Beaumont had a share was *twenty-six*, of the rest only ten: *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *A King and No King*, and *The Scornful Lady* were reprinted again and again; and the judgment of posterity will on the whole confirm that of the reading public of their own age.

V.

THE foregoing examination is a tedious but necessary preliminary. It was necessary, before we could estimate the character of Beaumont's genius, to determine what writings ought to be assigned to his pen. We may now claim to have a solid foundation upon which to build, and clearly defined limits of reference for support of our estimate, an estimate which has to some extent been already stated piecemeal as it was reached in the foregoing investigation, where, as each point was determined, it was necessarily adduced as evidence, confirming half-formed conclusions and indicating fresh lines of discovery. It remains to sum up the characteristics already pointed out, and to add those other criticisms which may be suggested by a general survey of the field which now lies open.

We have seen that as regards metre he is on the whole a follower of the older school, whose blank verse is stately and somewhat monotonous, confining itself as far as possible within the limits of ten syllables and avoiding redundancy both at the end of the verse and elsewhere; but that he had entirely broken away from the habit of making the pauses mainly at the end of the

lines, and runs on from verse to verse almost as freely as Shakspere in his later period, though his pauses are not so skilfully varied, and he avoids ending the line upon a weak syllable. The structure both of his verse and of his sentence is generally somewhat rhetorical, the verse is smooth and rounded, and the sentence is in a balanced or periodic form, suitable to the lofty tone which he adopts in tragedy, and to the picturesque descriptions in which he always delights. The style is vigorous, and ornamented rather by metaphor than by simile. In almost all these points he is the direct antithesis of Fletcher. For ordinary comic dialogue he uses prose, but he also employs his verse for purposes of burlesque, in which case it often has double endings and sometimes it rhymes. The tendency to burlesque is one of his most certain characteristics. In construction he shows considerable skill, more especially as regards the introduction of his characters and the preparation for situations; his plots were perhaps generally of his own invention, in which respect he follows the newer school of dramatists, which abandoned chronicles and sought for novelty of incident: but in other respects he is an apt pupil of the older dramatists, and especially of Shakspere, whom, notwithstanding some indignities, such as the quotation from *Henry IV.* in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, he seems to have sincerely admired. His inferiority, as compared with Fletcher, is in colloquial ease, and that readiness of repartee which is thought to distinguish the conversation of gentlemen; his temperament must have been naturally grave, and congenial rather to tragedy than comedy,

but for wit he had humour, and contributed to the common stock many of the most amusing scenes. Compare the wit of Mirabell, Monsieur Thomas, and Don John, excellent of its kind, with the humour belonging to the creator of Bessus, of the citizen spectator, and of the Merrythoughts, wife and husband. The exhibition of the temper of the latter—his refusal to consider his estate if he thought it would spoil his singing, and his philosophy of life based upon the principle that "use makes perfectness," * in combination with the practical comments of the citizen and his wife, is humorous in the highest degree, and the perplexity and final dismay of Bessus at the unexpected manner in which Arbaces

* "*Merrythought* (*within*). Nose, nose, jolly red nose,
And who gave thee this jolly red nose?

Mrs. Merrythought. Hark, my husband! he's singing and hoiting, and I am fain to cark and care, and all little enough. Husband! Charles! Charles Merrythought!

Enter OLD MERRYTHOUGHT.

Mer. Nutmegs and ginger, cinnamon and cloves;
And they gave me this jolly red nose.

Mrs. Mer. If you would consider your estate, you would have little list to sing, I wis.

Mer. It should never be considered, while it were an estate, if I thought it would spoil my singing.

Mrs. Mer. But how wilt thou do, Charles? Thou art an old man, and canst not work, and thou hast not forty shillings left, and thou eatest good meat, and drinkest good drink, and laughest.

Mer. And will do.

Mrs. Mer. But how wilt thou come by it, Charles?

Mer. How? Why, how have I done hitherto these forty years? I never came into my dining-room, but at eleven and six o'clock I found excellent meat and drink on the table; my clothes were never worn out but next morning a tailor brought me a new suit; and without question it will be so ever! use makes perfectness."

(*Knight of the Burning Pestle*, i. 4.)

receives his ready complaisance are evidently drawn by a genius which could appreciate the contrasts presented by human life, and the near neighbourhood everywhere of tragedy and comedy.

As we have found our author's genius to be of the graver kind which is more congenial to the tragic aspects of life, it will not surprise us to discover that his serious work is deeply tinged with the "irony" which is characteristic of the graver and more thoughtful of the world's dramatists. Nor is this a light and accidental mark; it belongs only to those who are penetrated with a consciousness of the serious significance of human life, and consequently also of its scenic representation, and who aim constantly at the artistic unity of structure which belongs to the best dramatic work. It is an instrument most effective, but only to be used with success by those who can both live in the characters which they create, and at the same time keep their mind steadily fixed upon the whole. The dramatic irony is thought to be especially characteristic of the Greek tragic poets, but it is no less so of Shakspere among the English. Among Shakspere's contemporaries however few will be found to use it in any marked degree, unless it be the subject of the present essay, whose intensity of feeling and artistic skill in construction was eminently favourable to its effective display.

The dramatic irony is no mere playwright's device; it is the scenic representation of the practical contrast in human life between the show and the reality; and upon the subject of the practical irony of life we cannot refrain

from quoting out of the fascinating essay of Thirlwall *On the Irony of Sophocles:* "All who have lived long enough in the world must be able to remember objects coveted with impatient eagerness, and pursued with long and unremitting toil, which in possession have proved tasteless and worthless: hours embittered with anxiety and dread by the prospect of changes which brought with them the fulfilment of the most ardent wishes: events anticipated with trembling expectation which arrived, passed, and left no sensible trace behind them; while things of which they scarcely heeded the existence, persons whom they met with indifference, exerted the most important influence on their character and fortunes. When, at a sufficient interval and with altered mood, we review such instances of the mockery of fate, we can hardly refrain from a melancholy smile. And such, we conceive, though without any of the feelings that sometimes sadden our retrospect, must have been the look which a superior intelligence, exempt from our passions, and capable of surveying all our relations, and foreseeing the consequences of all our actions, would at that time have cast upon the tumultuous workings of our blind ambition and our groundless apprehensions, upon the phantoms we raised to chase us, or to be chased, while the substance of good and evil presented itself to our view, and was utterly disregarded." * The place which such a superior intelligence might hold in relation to the actual world of human beings is occupied by the dramatic poet in relation to the creatures of his imagi-

* *Thirlwall's Remains*, vol. iii. p. 4.

nation which he places before his spectators. He cannot but feel the contrast between the show and the reality, between the ends pursued and the ways followed by the beings whose destiny he controls, and those which would be suggested by a fuller knowledge of the plan to which their action is to be subordinated. This very subordination of their action to a plan of which they can know nothing has in it all the elements of the practical irony; and to bring this before the minds of the spectators may add immensely to the dramatic force of the situation. This can be done either simply by the arrangements of the incidents, or more artificially by the utterances of the characters concerned, which to the mind of an attentive spectator of the whole action may convey a meaning other than that of which the speaker is supposed to be conscious. And such means of heightening the tragic interest will be instinctively used by the artist who has complete control over his materials and rules really like a god in his little world. Of such Shakspere is chief, and there are needed only a few examples of his use of this delicate instrument to make our meaning clear.

The tragedy of *Julius Cæsar* is saturated with it throughout. Nothing in that magnificent drama is more striking than the contrast between the apparent success of the conspirators and the inevitable failure which is involved in the accomplishment of their immediate object.

> "We all stand up against the spirit of Cæsar;
> And in the spirit of men there is no blood:
> O that we then could come by Cæsar's spirit,
> And not dismember Cæsar!"

"In the spirit of men there is no blood"—yet these men intend by shedding Cæsar's blood to destroy his spirit. The momentary flash of insight only makes the blindness more apparent; but the thought must already cross the minds of those who have just seen Cæsar's physical infirmities contrasted with his spiritual mightiness, that the conspirators will but set free that mighty spirit from its body's prison, and send it forth to range mightier than before. We are never allowed by the poet to lose sight of this contrast between body and spirit. It is "Cæsar's spirit ranging for revenge" which is destined to "cry havoc and let loose the dogs of war" upon his murderers, and upon the innocents to whom his murderers desired to do good; and Brutus too is at last brought to confess the irresistible power:—

> "O Julius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet;
> Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
> In our own proper entrails."

This is the irony which colours the whole design, but the details are full of ironical touches. In such a light must appear the desperate eagerness of the faction to win the support of the one man whose support is destined to be their destruction; and the irony reaches its climax in the reflection of Cassius:—

> "Therefore 'tis meet
> That noble minds keep ever with their likes."

For it is not the noble mind alone which is to suffer by contact with those of coarser metal, it is destined to bring ruin quite as much on those who think to profi

by its fall, who seek its fellowship in order to give a specious colour to their designs. In such a light too, we must evidently regard the cry of the mob who hears the justification of Brutus, "Let him be Cæsar!" and the repeated undervaluing of the man who is reserved after all to pronounce the epitaph of the conspirators.

But, in fact, all the greater Shaksperian dramas abound with instances. *Macbeth* is full of them.

> "He was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust,"

says Duncan of the traitor Cawdor, and turns at once to welcome the new Cawdor with all the assurances of his gratitude and confidence. Deeply ironical to those who know the welcome preparing for Duncan, is the commendation of Macbeth's castle by his unconscious victims, as the abode of cheerful peace, where, to their ears at least, no raven croaks, but "the temple-haunting martlet" securely builds her shelter. And terribly fraught with meaning for those who have already seen the doom of the family of Macduff, are the unconscious words of Malcolm, "He hath not touched you yet." One final example must be quoted from *Hamlet*,—the tremendous sentence of death passed upon himself by the king in his admonition to Laertes:—

> "No place indeed should murder sanctuarize:
> Revenge should have no bounds."

But of this perhaps something too much; let us return to our author. To him, rather than to his fellow-worker,

belong the instances which we meet with in their joint work; for Fletcher had hardly the perception of moral unity, or the earnestness of character and genius, which seek expression naturally under the form of dramatic irony, and his genius is too free and unconfined to force itself into any unnatural form.

In *The Maid's Tragedy* it is mainly of the anticipatory kind. We feel it in the wish of Melantius, on hearing of the ill-fated marriage between his sister and his friend, "Peace of mind betwixt them;" and more strongly we find it in the innocent complaint of the deserted Aspatia, which suggests reflections and comparisons of a far different kind than she intends:—

> "This should have been
> My rite; and all your hands have been employed
> In giving me a spotless offering
> To young Amintor's bed, as we are now
> For you. Pardon, Evadne; would my worth
> Were great as yours, or that the king, or he,
> Thought so!" (ii. 1.)

And again, where Amintor unconsciously touches the root of the evil and passes it by:—

> "Or by those hairs, which, if thou hadst a soul
> Like to thy locks, were threads for kings to wear
> About their arms"—(ii. 1).

To speak generally, the situation of Amintor, most miserable in the height of apparent happiness, and of the king slain in his amorous security, are examples of the contrast in which irony most delights.

In *A King and No King*, the groundwork of the

drama, suggesting always the contrast between the absolute authority of the king over his subjects, and the slavish subjection of the man to his passion, lends itself obviously to the ironical treatment. The climax is reached when to be dispossessed of his apparent power is found the only way to secure the real object of desire; and at this point the effect is heightened by the unconscious recurrence of Arbaces, in the moment of his welcome humiliation, to the language of absolute power:—

> "Why, I will have 'em all that know it racked,
> To get this from 'em."
>
> "He shall have chariots easier than air,
> That I will have invented; and ne'er think
> He shall pay any ransom;"

while in the next moment after such speeches as these, he is either calling in all to witness his abdication, or kneeling to Panthea as the humblest of her subjects. In every part of the play, the capricious violence of Arbaces affords materials for the veiled contrasts of which we speak. Arbaces hardly less frequently than Œdipus innocently plays with his doom before it is revealed. The pride which boasted of Panthea before he had seen her, that Nature had made

> "no man worthy for her taste
> But me that am too near her,"

almost suggests already the scourge by which it is to be chastised. Again, when he hears of his mother's plot against his life—

> "What will the world
> Conceive of me? with what unnatural sins
> Will they suppose me laden, when my life
> Is sought by her that gave it to the world?
> But yet he writes me comfort here: my sister,
> He says, is grown in beauty and in grace," etc. (i. 1.)

As he utters the words, his thought is far indeed from the truth that this very beauty and grace is destined to be to him the greater curse, nay, to point the way even to the act of those unnatural sins from the imagined imputation of which he shrinks in horror. On the other hand the loud "'Tis false" with which he endeavours to silence those who assure him that it is indeed his sister whom he sees, foreshadows, however dimly, the final discovery, though he speaks the words now against his own conviction. One more example may be taken from the mouth of Panthea, where, speaking of Tigranes, she says:—

> "For if he were a thing 'twixt god and man,
> I could gaze on him,—if I knew it sin
> To love him,—without passion." (ii. 1.)

And yet she was so soon to feel the rising of a passion for one whom she believes to be her own brother.

To multiply instances of this kind and to examine all the works of our author from this point of view, would be tedious and unnecessary. Enough, if we have established that a delicate and instinctive use of the dramatic irony is a mark by which he may be distinguished from many of his contemporaries, and most of all from Fletcher. And a certain tendency to fatalism, which we should perhaps be justified in ascribing to

him,* would not be unfavourable to the development of this power, by its suggestions of "the contrast between man with his hopes, fears, wishes, and undertakings, and a dark, inflexible fate." †

Closely connected with the subject just discussed is the observance by our author of the essential rule of unity of action. Many of the contemporary dramatists are justly charged with failure to observe the due measure which art requires, and to lay upon their somewhat chaotic materials the law which distinguishes a work of art from a confused and tumultuous assemblage of characters and piling together of incidents. We are speaking of no mechanical unities, in which, as Dryden observes, Fletcher and Shakspere are "both deficient, but Shakspeare most." The unity which is required to constitute the work of art will be attained by the artist instinctively and without the help of the critic. But the so-called romantic drama of Shakspere and his contemporaries has dangers in this direction from which the comparative simplicity of the Greek preserved it. As is observed by a brilliant French critic, "Neither in

* *Philaster*, i. 2:—

> "But spend not hasty time
> In seeking how I came thus; 'tis the gods,
> The gods, that make me so;"

and ii. 3:—

> "If Destiny (to whom we dare not say,
> Why didst thou this?) have not decreed it so
> In lasting leaves (whose smallest characters
> Were never altered), yet this match shall break."

† *Thirlwall's Remains*, vol. iii. p. 2.

Greece, nor Italy, nor Spain, nor France has an art been seen which tried so fully to express the soul, with the soul's most intimate relations—the truth, and the whole truth. How," he continues, "did they succeed, and what is this new art which confounds all ordinary rules? It is an art for all that, since it is natural; a great art, since it embraces more things and that more deeply than others do, like the art of Rembrandt and Rubens; but like the art of Rembrandt and Rubens, it is a Teutonic art, and one whose every step is in contrast with those of classical art. What the Greeks and Romans, the originators of the latter, sought in everything was propriety and order. Monuments, statues, and paintings, the theatre, eloquence, and poetry, from Sophocles to Racine, they shaped all their work in the same mould, and attained beauty by the same method. In the infinite entanglement and complexity of things, they grasped a small number of simple ideas, which they embrace in a small number of simple representations, so that the vast confused vegetation of life is presented to the mind from that time forth, pruned and reduced and perhaps easily embraced by a single glance. . . . In the hands of Frenchmen, the last inheritors of the simple art, these great legacies of antiquity undergo no change. . . . Racine puts on the stage a single action, whose details he proportions and whose course he regulates; no incident, nothing unforeseen, no appendices, or incongruities, no secondary intrigue. . . . In England all is different: all that the French call proportion and fitness is wanting. Englishmen do not trouble themselves about

them, they do not need them, There is no unity: they leap suddenly over twenty years, or five hundred leagues. There are twenty scenes in an act—we stumble without preparation from one to the other, from tragedy to buffoonery; usually it appears as though the action gained no ground; the characters waste their time in conversation, dreaming, expanding their parts. . . . And the disorder is as great in general as in particular things. They heap a whole reign, a complete war, an entire novel, into a drama; they cut up into scenes an English chronicle or an Italian novel: to this their art is reduced; the events matter little; whatever they are they accept them. They have no idea of progressive and single action. Two or three actions connected endwise or entangled one with another; two or three incomplete endings badly contrived and opened up again; no machinery but death, scattered right and left, and unforeseen; such is the logic of their method." * Such is the English drama as it appears to the classicist, and it must be admitted that there is not a little truth in the description. But, with all deference to the critic, it must be observed that art is not art merely because it is natural, and that if Shakspere has art, it must be because his works have unity of their own in spite of the confusion which is so bewildering to the Latin mind. To exhibit the laws of this unity in diversity is a task which may reasonably be expected from the Teutonic genius to which the art belongs, and no one needs to be

* Taine, *History of English Literature*, vol. i. p. 246. Van Laun's translation (corrected).

reminded of Goethe's fruitful analysis which, while dealing with one play only, suggested the manner in which the principle of "Unity of Action" should be applied to the whole romantic drama.

It is certain however that to this principle only the highest artists have fully conformed. It was the practice on the English and Spanish stage to use two stories—or, at least, two sets of characters—in each play, and it was not every dramatist who had the mastery of his craft which was needed to make all incidents and characters subordinate to a single end. Where the unity existed it was too often produced as it were forcibly and by mechanic rule. This is the impression made upon us by Jonson's skilfully constructed comedies; but such unity as we find in *As You Like it* and *Twelfth Night*, not to mention *Hamlet* or *Lear*, springs from the very artistic instinct itself.

We have hinted and maintain that, so far as regards construction, Beaumont would endure the same treatment which has been dealt out to Shakspere by Germans—a statement which can only be verified or refuted by trial. But before making the proof, it is perhaps necessary to say something about his moral tendencies. It is unfashionable no doubt to suppose that artists have moral aims, and to regard works of art from an ethical standpoint. But moral tendencies they must have, whether designed or no, and it is legitimate, at least in the case of the drama, to inquire with regard to each author what the moral tendency actually is. The answer to such questions, so far as our author is concerned, has

been rendered more difficult by the inextricable tangle in which he has been hitherto involved with another who stands on an entirely different level in this respect; and he has suffered also from the reproach which falls on all who fearlessly present human nature as it is, showing its strength always mingled with weakness and its virtue with vice, nowhere exhibiting ideal purity and perfection. To some of the charges which are indiscriminately levelled by Coleridge and others at the double personality called "Beaumont and Fletcher," the latter alone ought to plead guilty. To him belong Lucina and the rest, who "value their chastity as a material thing—not as an act and state [of being." * Female chastity is by Beaumont represented under more attractive forms: Arethusa, Aspatia, Viola, these are among the most beautiful and attractive of female characters, womanly as well as chaste. But as to the charge brought equally against both poets, of setting passion and impulse in the place of moral principle and reason, it is one which has been brought against almost every delineator of human nature, from Shakspere to George Eliot, from Molière to Balzac. Listen for a moment to the lively French critic from whom we have lately quoted, on the morality of Shakspere: "His master-faculty is impassioned imagination, free from the fetters of reason and morality." † "Reason tells us that our manners

* Coleridge, *Literary Remains.* So far does he regard them as inseparable, that he speaks of our *three* great tragedians, Shakspere, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger.

† Taine, *History of English Literature,* vol. i. p. 311. Van Laun's translation.

should be measured; this is why the manners which Shakspeare paints are not so." * "Ophelia becomes mad, Juliet commits suicide; no one but looks upon such madness and death as necessary. You will not then discover virtue in these souls, for by virtue is implied a conscientious desire to do good, a rational observance of duty. They are only pure through delicacy and love. They recoil from vice as a gross thing, not as an immoral thing. What they feel is not respect for the marriage vow but adoration of their husband. . . . If in fact Shakspeare comes across a heroic character, worthy of Corneille, a Roman, such as the mother of Coriolanus, he will explain by passion what Corneille would have explained by heroism." † "If Racine or Corneille had framed a psychology, they would have said with Descartes: Man is an incorporeal soul, served by organs, endowed with reason and will, living in palaces or porticoes, made for conversation and society, whose harmonious and ideal action is developed by discourse and replies, in a world constructed by logic beyond the realms of time and space. If Shakspeare had framed a psychology, he would have said with Esquirol: Man is a nervous machine, governed by a mood, disposed to hallucinations, transported by unbridled passions, essentially unreasoning, a mixture of animal and poet, having fancy instead of mind, and emotion instead of virtue, with imagination for prompter and guide, and led at random, by the most determined and

* Taine, *History of English Literature*, vol. i., p. 312.
† Ibid., p. 328.

complex circumstances, to pain, crime, madness, and death." *

No one will deny that there is some truth in this estimate, though it overlooks the intellectual element in Shakspere's creations. But while granting, as of right, to Shakspere the sovereignty over the whole field of human nature, intellect and passion alike, we are not therefore to reject utterly the art of his less gifted fellows, which represents the same human nature within narrower limits; and, remembering how rare are Hamlets in real life, we shall perhaps be inclined to think that the less comprehensive view may nevertheless be in its own sphere no very untrue or degraded representation; that, in short, man is for the most part under the influence of passion, even when he seems to himself and to others to be for the time guided by reason, and that when he does right it is more often by following his half-rational impulses of various kinds than from the highest and purest sense of duty.

Nor does this necessarily imply an immoral tendency in the works of these authors. Shakspere's morality is sound, not because his characters reason about the principles of action, nor because a moral is drawn from the contemplation of society by wearied libertines like Jaques or ruined spendthrifts like Timon, but because moral truth is kept before the mind of his reader, even where poetical justice is not rendered to his characters: the final impression produced is favourable and strongly favourable to the moral law: we are seldom allowed to

* Taine, *History of English Literature*, vol. i. p. 340. (In this passage Van Laun's translation has been necessarily much altered.)

lose sight of the great distinctions of right and wrong, though the noble-natured Othello and the devilish Iago, the over-conscientious Hamlet and the adulterous assassin Claudius be involved together in the same material ruin. There is no tampering with the foundations of morality, no perplexing of the boundaries of virtue and vice.

Can the same be said of his contemporaries? Of Jonson, yes. Of Fletcher, no. Of Beaumont, on the whole, yes. The exception in the latter case does not consist in any grossness or licentiousness of expression, from this none are free, but chiefly in the *dénoûement* of a single drama, where, for the sake of making the conclusion happy, he has marred with a grave artistic and moral defect what is otherwise perhaps the most powerful of his works. It is an error committed by Shakspere himself in a lower degree, where in *Measure for Measure* the deputy Angelo is forgiven for his atrocious design, because by accident he has failed to do what he thinks he has done; and that most tragic drama becomes a comedy after all. It is as if, in *Othello*, Desdemona had been but half strangled and had revived to live happily with her husband to the end of their days; it is such a mangling of the design as Charles II. is said to have required of his poet-laureate, before *The Maid's Tragedy* could be endured by the courtly morality of the time. For the most part we may say that Beaumont's morality is as sound in essentials as Shakspere's. It is natural, however, that the popular suspicion of immorality should concentrate itself upon "Beaumont and Fletcher." Shakspere repels the charge by essential

healthiness of sentiment combined with true spiritual depth; Jonson, even when at his coarsest, ostentatiously parades a moral purpose; and of the rest, "Beaumont and Fletcher" is the most obvious representative name. Moreover, as has been already stated, the suspicion is not undeserved if the names be taken in this undistinguishable combination. The impurity which deforms Fletcher's graceful pastoral was, it may be feared, more deeply rooted in his nature than any artistic ideal, and went far beyond mere indecency of expression. The age was outspoken on subjects about which we are reticent; accordingly, a line must be carefully drawn between what is actually vicious, and what is merely, by the standard of our ideas of refinement, coarse. The frank indecency which expresses everything, and leaves nothing to the imagination, is generally less dangerous to morality than the prurient suggestiveness which veils real grossness under a fair external covering. To the former category belongs the indecency of Shakspere: "In this age and on this stage," says M. Taine, "decency was a thing unknown. . . . Shakspeare's words are too indecent to be translated. . . . The talk of ladies and gentlemen is full of coarse allusions; we should have to find out an alehouse of the lowest description to hear the like words nowadays." * True enough, no doubt, but how much of this coarseness is of such a kind as to corrupt one who is not already corrupted? Fletcher, on the other hand, while sharing in the common indecency of expression, too often suggests impure ideas in refined phrase, and is in

* *History of English Literature*, vol. i. p. 313. Van Laun's translation.

this respect, as in many others, the precursor of the really immoral comedy of the Restoration, to which is owing so much of the prejudice which still in this country attaches to the stage. But while we acquit the younger and graver partner of the more serious charge, yet we must admit also that in the plays produced by the authors in common, for the construction of which we hold him mainly responsible, there too often occurs something essential to the plot, and not merely incidental in the dialogue, which justly offends a refined delicacy. Examples of this are afforded by the relations of Evadne and Amintor in *The Maid's Tragedy*, the incestuous passion of Arbaces in *A King and No King*, and the love of Leontius and Bacha in *Cupid's Revenge*. The situations are exceptional and unpleasant, and therefore should have been instinctively avoided. The fact that Shakspere hardly affords more than a single example of this fault is certainly remarkable, and may be ascribed partly to the delicacy of his artistic perception, but still more to the width of the field over which he ranged, rendering it unnecessary to create the sensations of novelty by refining upon the emotion represented. Inferior writers, who harp too often upon a single string of that instrument upon which Shakspere plays at will, are apt in their strivings for variety to develop "le goût de l'exception," which a French critic notes as a characteristic of the modern drama, in contravention of the first condition of dramatic emotion, "that the passions should be true"—that is, common to humanity. And the emotion of love, which is the principal theme of our authors

can least of all endure to be treated thus without offence to the delicate sensibility.

These various considerations, taken either separately or together, will account both for the popular prejudice and for the animadversions of critics. It is remarked for example by William Hazlitt, that Beaumont and Fletcher are apt to present us with "weakness of moral constitution struggling with wilful and violent situations," that they "fondly and gratuitously cast the seeds of crime into forbidden ground, to see how they will shoot up and vegetate with luxuriance. They are not *safe* teachers of morality: they tamper with it like an experiment tried *in corpore vili*, and seem to regard the decomposition of the common affections and the dissolution of the strict bonds of society as an agreeable and careless pastime." * This is evidently intended for censure, yet fault is not found with Shakspere because in Hamlet he has shown us a weak moral constitution struggling with the violent situation into which it is thrown by the mere will of the poet. And the words "casting the seeds of crime," and watching them "shoot up and vegetate with luxuriance," seem to describe the workings of the imagination in every maker of tragedy from Æschylus downwards. Indeed, the luxuriant vegetation of crime is almost a necessary condition of its tragic catastrophe; and the critic in his attack upon Beaumont and Fletcher has clearly mistaken an offence against delicacy for an offence against morality.

But it must not be supposed that their treatment of

* *Lectures on the Elizabethan Dramatists.*

love is always thus offensive. Among the most pleasing characteristics of Beaumont ought to be mentioned a strong sense of the romance of lovers in its everyday aspect, and apart from the tragic intensities of the loftiest dramatic invention. We find in his lesser works domestic idylls of such sweetness and beauty, that they are of themselves sufficient, without mention of the highest productions of his genius, to refute the charge brought against him in combination with his partner, of penetrating no deeper than the fashion, of seeing nothing but the superficial manners of men and women. His Viola and his Violante are not indeed heroines, but they are charming creatures, with all the woman's self-sacrificing affection, and the maiden's purity of thought and feeling, though one of them is indeed no maid; while both Ricardo and Gerrard are justly objects of our sympathy, though the first has offended once in the madness of drink, and the second has formally sinned against the law of chastity. The interest in both cases is chiefly of the idyllic kind: there is true pathos in the timidity of Viola leaving her father's house to meet her lover; in her terror at his drunkenness and wild companions, and her vain cries for admission to the house of her father's friend, where she appears but as a piteous voice, easily repulsed by a few rough words; and finally in the gentleness of her behaviour to the farmer's scolding wife her mistress, though this last scene belongs rather to Fletcher, to whom we have attributed also the admirable characterization of the vagabond tinker with his trull, and of the milkmaids who take the unfortunate Viola home. Of

the other play, it may fairly be said that there is hardly a prettier domestic scene in the English drama than the conversation of Violante and her mother after the birth of the child, which is quoted in Lamb's *Specimens of the Dramatists.*

"*Viol.* Mother,—I'd not offend you,—might not Gerrard
Steal in, and see me in the evening?
Ang. Well;
Bid him do so.
Viol. Heaven's blessing o' your heart!—
Do you not call child-bearing *travel*, mother?
Ang. Yes.
Viol. It well may be: the barefoot traveller
That's born a prince, and walks his pilgrimage,
Whose tender feet kiss the remorseless stones
Only, ne'er felt a travel like to it.
Alas, dear mother, you groaned thus for me;
And yet how disobedient have I been!
Ang. Peace, Violante; thou hast always been
Gentle and good.
Viol. Gerrard is better, mother:
Oh, if you knew the implicit innocency
Dwells in his breast, you'd love him like your prayers!
I see no reason but my father might
Be told the truth, being pleased for Ferdinand
To woo himself; and Gerrard ever was
His full comparative: my uncle loves him
As he loves Ferdinand.
Ang. No, not for the world! . . .
Viol. As you please, mother. I am now, methinks,
Even in the land of ease; I'll sleep.
Ang. Draw in
The bed nearer the fire.—Silken rest
Tie all thy cares up!"*

Another type of female character which belongs especially to Beaumont is that of the unhappy victim

* *Four Plays in One: Triumph of Love*, scene iii.

of unrequited love. Upon such he has expended some of his loveliest verse. Euphrasia and Aspatia have this in common with one another, that they find pretty and fantastic ways of expressing their griefs and desires; their minds are not absolutely unhinged by their situation, but in a sense they may be said to "walk distracted." Quaint and picturesque imaginings occur to them, and poetical language flows naturally from their lips. While the one sits by the fountain side and wreathes her garland in the mystic order which expresses her sorrow, the other, when she sees a bank of flowers, tells with a sigh what a pretty place it were to bury lovers in, and bids her maidens pluck the flowers and strew them over her body like a corse. The grief which feeds itself by such ingenious torments must soon bring the mind to madness or near it; and this fanciful mood of artificial sorrow, combined as it is in each case with the masquerading in male attire, marks a mind shaken though not overthrown; the imagination is perfectly sweet and pure still; there is nothing of that drawing aside of the veil of maiden modesty which so naturally marks the real madness of Ophelia, and increases our pity while it diminishes our respect; the type, however, is almost necessarily morbid in proportion as the situation is strained and unnatural, and if Euphrasia is saner than Aspatia, it is chiefly because the former can satisfy her affections in some degree by serving the object of them, while the latter is left to indulge her imagination in a hopeless desertion, and can see in herself only an Ariadne with no consoling deity to make the wild island less desolate.

VI.

IT is proposed to illustrate what has been said by examination of three representative works, in each of which our author had undoubtedly the principal share —a tragedy, a tragicomedy (so-called),* and a burlesque —that so we may present him as far as possible in his living personality, apart from questions of divided authorship and discussion of literary characteristics.

The Maid's Tragedy is probably better known to the public than any other of the plays which pass under the names Beaumont and Fletcher, for in some form it still occasionally appears upon the stage, and indeed it could hardly have been otherwise with a drama of such remarkable acting merits. There is probably no tragedy in the English language with equal capability for stage

* The term "tragicomedy" is used to designate many of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, and Fletcher adopted for his *Faithful Shepherdess* the name of "pastoral tragicomedy," reminding the reader in the preface to the printed edition that "a tragicomedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned; so that a god is as lawful in this as in a tragedy, and mean people as in a comedy. Thus much I hope will serve to justify my poem, and make you understand it; to teach you more for nothing, I do not know that I am in conscience bound."

effects, or presenting at the same time situations so forcible and characters so easily rendered. Its inevitable popularity has exposed it to the depreciation of the more fastidious critics, amongst whom are William Hazlitt and W. B. Donne. The former expresses his censure, as might be expected, in the most extravagant terms, and (among other things) condemns the plot as grossly absurd and improbable. His questions: Why does the king marry Evadne to any one? why to Amintor? are answered sufficiently in the play, but might equally, though more prosaically, be answered by quotation from the too realistic drama of the next age,* which proves that such an incident was not so grossly improbable but that it sometimes in real life occurred, though doubtless the added injunction of fidelity to the first lover belongs rather to the earlier period, which by a coincidence that is sufficiently startling supplies a historical parallel even to this part of the story.

Almost in the very same year † in which *The Maid's Tragedy* was produced, a young girl, not more than eighteen years old, a daughter of the proudest family of the English nobility, formed the resolve so to live with the husband to whom she was about to be married that she might boast herself married to him only in name, and reserve herself untainted by his embraces for a lover who, worthless profligate as he was, had risen under his contemptible sovereign to the highest place to which a subject could aspire. This resolution she actually carried

* *e.g.* Congreve, *Way of the World*, ii. 4.

† *i.e.* about the beginning of 1610.

out, by the assistance of the vile instruments whom she employed, for three years. "My father and mother are angry" (she wrote to one of these wretched accomplices), "but I had rather die a thousand times over [than yield]; for besides the sufferings, I should lose *his* love." And finally she succeeded in obtaining a decree which pronounced her marriage with this husband null and void, and married the lover to whom she had so disgracefully attached herself. The first marriage had not indeed been devised as a cloak for the intrigue, nor does the intention seem to have been avowed with the unblushing boldness which belongs to Evadne, but the feeling and behaviour of the wife towards the husband must have been in all essentials the same as in the play. Such is the miserable story of Frances Howard, Countess of Essex and then of Somerset, as it is obscurely but sufficiently indicated in the records of State Trials, and in the letters of contemporaries; though the scandalous tale would have been buried in silence so far at least as posterity was concerned, if the unhallowed object had not been attained by murder as well as by desecration of the marriage bond. The historical criminal has indeed far less claim to our sympathy and interest, for Evadne slew boldly and as performing an act of penitence and vengeance, while the woman who played so fearful a part in the tragedy of real life, descended to the mean arts of the poisoner to gain her guilty ends, and shed no tears of repentance until the shame of exposure and the sentence of the law wrung them at length from her eyes.

This tale of vulgar crime is told from no idle curiosity in remarking coincidences, though the coincidence is remarkable enough; nor simply to vindicate the plot of *The Maid's Tragedy* from the charge of gross improbability—for on this it was hardly necessary to bestow much pains, and to prove that a thing has actually occurred is not the same thing as to prove that it is natural in a dramatic sense: but rather as a suggestion of the subtle links which may generally be found between the real life of any age and its dramatic literature, consisting not so much of direct references (such reference in this case at least is impossible), or vulgar realism which is the vice of an unpoetical age, as in the delicate harmonies of tone and manner which subsist between the living dramatist and the living generation to whom he spoke, who found such incidents incredible neither within the walls of the theatre nor without them, and to whom some of these plays must have given an impression of living reality which in times of more modestly veiled passion and more carefully cloaked crime must almost necessarily be absent.* And it has been well observed of this period by one who was a great dramatist though not in plays, that "the strong contrast produced by the opposition of ancient manners to those which are gradually subduing them, affords the lights and shadows necessary to give effect to a fictitious narrative; and while such a period entitles the author

* The story of the alteration of this particular drama in order that its conclusion might be more tolerable to the court of Charles II. is a further illustration of this remark.

to introduce incidents of a marvellous and improbable character, as arising out of the turbulent independence and ferocity belonging to old habits of violence, still influencing the manners of a people who had been so lately in a barbarous state; yet, on the other hand, the characters and sentiments of many of the actors may with the utmost probability be described with great variety of shading and delineation, which belongs to the newer and more improved period of which the world has but lately received the light. The reign of James I. of England possessed this advantage in a peculiar degree." * And although these remarks were not intended by the author to apply to the extraordinary development of the drama at that period, but merely to justify himself in his choice of time and place for a fictitious narrative, yet they contain as near an approach to solution of some of the problems suggested by that development as we are at present likely to reach. And if in this case the deed upon which the plot turns is revolting, both by the profligate selfishness of its design and by the frontless impudence of its execution, it is not therefore necessarily unfit for the purpose of the dramatist.

The plot is, with one trifling exception, a model of simplicity. Each incident develops itself naturally out of the preceding circumstances; there is no secondary intrigue, and the moral bearings are at no point uncertain. A rapid outline will recall the main sequence of events.

Amintor, betrothed to Aspatia, deserts her and

* Scott, Introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel.*

marries Evadne at the king's command. She shamelessly avows upon the marriage night that she is the mistress of the king, and will stoop no lower than the highest. She has been married only that she may have one "to father children, and to bear the name of husband." Amintor's first impulse to revenge is checked by the sacred name of *King*, which for him has superstitious terrors, and he asks only the secrecy by which his reputation may be saved, while declaring that not the king's crown shall buy him now to Evadne's bed. Melantius, Evadne's brother and Amintor's friend, perceives his sadness and newly put-on reserve, and having by reproaches extorted the cause, is at first disposed to quarrel with the supposed defamer of his sister's name, and then puts back his sword with the thought that—

> "The name of *Friend* is more than family,
> Or all the world besides,"

and endeavours to enlist Amintor in a scheme for revenge. But Amintor's scruples will not allow him to participate in any such design, and Melantius has recourse to other and more fit helpers. In an interview with his sister he terrifies her into a wild repentance, and forces her to swear to take revenge upon the king when called upon by himself, and to keep secret the design from Amintor, to whom however she manifests her repentance, entreating his pardon, which he grants, though he will never receive her to his embraces. Summoned by the king to his chamber, Evadne resolutely consummates her vengeance, rushes with hands yet bloody to Amintor,

to lay before him the sacrifice which she imagines will wipe off her dishonour; then finding that this is no way to Amintor's love, she kills herself in his presence with the same weapon with which she has slain the king. The deserted Aspatia, whose wrongs ever disquiet the conscience of Amintor, had meanwhile come in disguise to provoke her death at his hand and dying makes herself known and receives his confession of love. Amintor cannot remain in life when she is gone, and Melantius, who by his skilfully concerted measures has forced the new king into treaty with himself, arrives only in time to receive into his bosom the departing soul of his friend.

The single exception to the general simplicity of the plot is the manner of Aspatia's reappearance in the fifth act, where, disguised as her own brother, she comes to demand satisfaction of Amintor for the injuries she has suffered at his hands. It may be true that the incident is "artfully prepared" by the casual mention of this brother and of their resemblance to one another, in the first act,* but it cannot be said that the incident itself is a natural one where it occurs, though some allowance may be made for the necessity of combining Aspatia and Amintor in the final catastrophe.

Because of the subordinate part played by Aspatia, the name of the drama has been criticised as unsuitable. But apart from the fact that the names of contemporary

* The mention in the same scene of the lady whom Melantius brings with him is much more adapted to raise expectations, which however are in no way fulfilled; and the purpose of the rather marked introduction of this character is by no means evident.

plays often give little insight into their contents,* there is in this case a perpetual undercurrent of reference to the sorrows of the deserted maid, and to the injury inflicted on her by Amintor, whence springs all the tragic complication, which can only be loosed by the death of him who has inflicted, and of her who has suffered the wrong. A deeper meaning need not be suspected, though there is indeed within this Maiden's Tragedy another of a more terrible kind, which has as much claim to be regarded as the central point of interest:—

> "I was once fair,
> Once I was lovely; not a blowing rose
> More chastely sweet, till thou, thou, thou foul canker,
> (Stir not) didst poison me. I was a world of virtue,
> Till your curst court and you (Hell bless you for it !),
> With your temptations on temptations,
> Made me give up mine honour."

Whether it was the intention of the author to convey this suggestion also in the title of the play is a question of small moment:† there is no doubt that the suggestion is conveyed, and that the tragedies of Aspatia and Evadne are inextricably knit together, not by external circumstances alone, but by the closer entanglements of artistic comparison and contrast. Between the two stands Amintor, who, if not the most interesting, is at least the central figure of the play: and for this position

* *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Every Man in his Humour*, *The Chances*, etc.

† Dyce suggests that the title was intended to refer to Evadne alone, quoting from the *Accounts of the Revels at Court* the following entry: "Shroue Teuesday: A play called *the proud Mayd's Tragedie.*"

his character is not ill suited, for he strongly engages our sympathy, and makes shipwreck of his life through weakness rather than crime. It is strange that the opinion should be so often repeated which was expressed first by Coleridge or Hazlitt, that Beaumont and Fletcher were "servile *jure divino* royalists," in illustration of which Coleridge, in his notes on *Valentinian*, remarks upon the arrogance of their tyrants and the reptile sentiments put into the mouth of their courtiers. It is possible indeed that they may have had political opinions, and it was natural to play-writers and play-actors to be at least anti-puritan; moreover it is true that Arbaces is arrogance itself, and that Aecius in *Valentinian*, and Amintor in *The Maid's Tragedy*, express in an extreme form the doctrine of passive obedience; and it is upon these instances that the opinion of Coleridge seems to be founded. But the opinion is derived from very superficial observation. Surely if these authors were such devoted royalists, and aimed so constantly at exhibiting their loyalty on the stage, it is strange and even unaccountable that so few sovereigns are represented in their plays as a sovereign would desire to be represented, and that so many are set up as objects of contempt and hatred. Valentinian is a lustful and bloodstained tyrant, Rollo is a treacherous murderer, Ferrand is a monster of cruelty and a torturer of women, the king in *The Maid's Tragedy* is a heartless profligate; and all these perish miserably by the hands of those whom they have injured. Arbaces is a slave to his worst passions, and is only saved from crime by a dis-

covery which deprives him of his crown; the king in *Philaster* is a feeble coward, and Prince Pharamond is drawn in the most unflattering colours; the duke (or king) in *Cupid's Revenge* is a contemptible fool and coxcomb; Antigonus, in *The Humorous Lieutenant*, is an "old man with young desires;" and neither Thierry nor Theodoret can be envied in their lot. The arrogance of these tyrants is usually the pride which goes before a fall, and the loyal sentiments of an Amintor or an Aecius serve as foil to the opposite feelings of a Melantius or a Maximus. A survey of this kind may perhaps come near to make us think that, at least in the earlier part of their career and before the time when Fletcher became a court poet, the vices of kings and the punishments which followed were their favourite subjects of contemplation. The formal moral of *Philaster* is—

> "Let princes learn
> By this to rule the passions of their blood;
> For what Heaven wills can never be withstood."

and that of *The Maid's Tragedy* is set to the same tune:—

> "For on lustful kings
> Unlooked-for sudden deaths from Heaven are sent;
> But cursed is he that is their instrument."

The last line, indeed, may seem to modify the effect of the former, but it is not necessary to consecrate assassination in order to be thought no servile loyalist. It is certain that these poets were looked upon by the succeeding age as no safe teachers of submission. Incredible as it may seem to those who regard them as "servile *jure divino* royalists," it is nevertheless true that they

were taken to task by Dryden for their defect in this direction. After observing that neither Arbaces nor the king in *The Maid's Tragedy* has the virtues proper to royalty, though the latter at least seems to be a lawful prince (an admission which is qualified by the historical doubt whether there was ever any king in Rhodes), he proceeds, "Nor is Valentinian managed much better, and though Fletcher has taken his picture truly and drawn him as he was, an effeminate voluptuous man, yet he has forgotten that he was an emperor, and has given him none of those royal marks which ought to appear in a lawful successor of the throne." * Certainly sovereigns have much less reason to be obliged to Beaumont and Fletcher in this respect than to Shakspere.

The purpose of this digression is indicated by the lines quoted above from the drama with which we are concerned. Those lines express the moral which lies upon the surface, but the interest is really concentrated upon the opposition between the claims of loyalty and the obligations of common morality. The superstitious loyalty of Amintor is the amiable weakness which leads him first to break troth, and then to connive at his own dishonour; and so far does it lead him, that when at the

* Introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*. The principle is thus stated by Rymer: "We are to presume the highest virtues where we find the highest of rewards; and though it is not necessary that all heroes should be kings, yet undoubtedly all crowned heads by poetical right are heroes. This character is a flower, a prerogative so certain, so inseparably annexed to the crown, as by no poet, no parliament of poets, ever to be invaded." (*Tragedies of the Last Age, etc.*, p. 61: quoted by Scott on the passage of Dryden). But this prerogative seems, according to Dryden, not to belong to all crowned heads, but only to legitimate sovereigns.

last he stands alone, and feels his earth, as it were, quaking under his feet, we are conscious that for the man who was too weak to keep his pure vows to Aspatia, and yet too conscientious to accept the bloodstained offering of Evadne, nothing remains but to follow those who call him after them, and to dispossess his soul of the house of which she grows weary.

Yet the man who is overtaken by this cureless ruin has in him almost all the qualities which are fit to engage our sympathy:—

> "His worth is great; valiant he is, and temperate;
> And one that never thinks his life his own,
> If his friend need it." (i. 1.).

And there must certainly have been a rare power of fascination in the personality of him for whom the deserted maid so inconsolably sorrowed; whose white-souled innocence could move the repentant Evadne to so wild a longing for his forgiveness and favour; and finally with whom, notwithstanding defect of years, the brave Melantius was wont to change his soul in talk, to whom he would have confessed his secret sins. Yet he is sufficiently proved to be a fit person for dishonour by the too ready consent to leave her who has his promise and his love, at the mere command of a king, and to accept instead of her a bride of the royal choosing. Here is the test of his worth, the touchstone by which his character is tried. The man who, because the king commands, will give up his betrothed bride and marry another in her stead, has thereby proved himself either an apt instrument or an unresisting victim of tyranny.

He hesitates indeed, and is conscience-stricken after a fashion, even suspecting for a moment that the king has not, after all, his subjects' *will* in keeping: but—

> "I only brake a promise,
> And 'twas the King enforced me,"—

that is the balm for his wounded honour; and when he reflects on his over-sensitive conscience, it is not to qualify the obligation of loyalty, but to excuse the guilt of broken vows,—strange combination of self-knowledge and self-deception. The punishment is terribly appropriate to the crime: the man who has sacrificed to the royal will his plighted troth, finds a bride who on the same altar has sacrificed her own virtue and his happiness, not indeed from any over-scrupulous loyalty, but none the less from regard to the place and not the person:—

> "I love with my ambition,
> Not with my eyes."

And when he would make a violent way to revenge, he is again checked by the name which caused him first to sin:—

> "In that sacred word,
> 'The King,' there lies a terror: What frail man
> Dares lift his hand against it? Let the gods
> Speak to him when they please; till when, let us
> Suffer and wait."

And he suffers accordingly, not the wrongs only, but insulting questions and threats, to which he can reply only with the passionate demand—

> "Why did you choose out me
> To make thus wretched? there were a thousand fools
> Easy to work on, and of state enough."

Alas, the answer is too clear, that he has chosen out himself to suffer this dishonour, by not scrupling at the act of dishonour which was first demanded of him; but he is allowed to think for a time that he suffers for his virtues rather:—

> "You might have ta'en
> Another.
> *King.* No, for I believe thee honest,
> As thou wert valiant.
> *Amin.* All the happiness
> Bestowed upon me turns into disgrace.
> Gods, take your honesty again, for I
> Am loaden with it." (iii. 1.)

His own honesty has become a burden to him, and he has been brought already to doubt whether there is any such thing in other men:—

> "I wonder much, Melantius,
> To see those noble looks, that make me think
> How virtuous thou art: and, on the sudden,
> 'Tis strange to me thou shouldst have worth and honour,
> Or not be base, and false, and treacherous," (iii. 1.)

He has come to "that dull calamity," "that strange misbelief of all the world," that he half suspects that all husbands are like himself, that every one he talks with—

> "Is but a well dissembler of his woes,
> As I am."

Of such misbelief concealment was the natural parent, and he might have gone down to his grave bearing about with him that blighting secret, but for one influence which the tyrant and his paramour had not taken into their account. They had reckoned with the character of Amintor, and their estimate had been justified by the event; but they had not reckoned with

the power of friendship, and on that rock they split. The name of friend is for Amintor too powerful a word to be resisted, and it is by this word that Melantius conjures forth the fatal secret, which once given can be won back neither by entreaties nor threats:—

> "Thou hast wrought
> A secret from me, under name of friend,
> Which art could ne'er have found, nor torture wrung
> From out my bosom. Give it me again;
> For I will find it, wheresoe'er it lies,
> Hid in the mortal'st part: invent a way
> To give it back.
> *Mel.* Why would you have it back?
> I will to death pursue him with revenge.
> *Amin.* Therefore I call it back from thee; for I know
> Thy blood so high, that thou wilt stir in this,
> And shame me to posterity." (iii. 2.)

The secret cannot be given back, but Amintor may be soothed and sent away smiling "to counterfeit again," nothing knowing or suspecting of the manner in which his friend means to right himself, and to take revenge for both. Such deeds may be entrusted to Evadne, but not to Amintor, even when the rage for revenge seizes him also and bears away with a rush his too scrupulous loyalty. Nothing more strongly marks the essential nobleness, and at the same time the characteristic weakness of Amintor, than the scene in which he is at this point played upon with the word which paralyzed his hand before, by the friend who fears only to have his own cooler design overthrown by madness:—

> "Amintor,
> Think what thou dost: I dare as much as valour:
> But 'tis the King, the King, the King, Amintor,
> With whom thou fightest." (iv. 1.)

The sword is charmed in an instant from his hand, and he is full of remorse for the imagined sin.

Not till the end is he thoroughly awakened from reproaches against those who have wronged him, and disbelief in human virtue and happiness, to a deep sense of his own fault; and he exclaims to the disguised Aspatia—

> "Leave me, for there is something in thy looks,
> That calls my sins in a most hideous form
> Into my mind;" (v. 4.)

When at last he stands between the dying and the dead, his words move pity and terror, no longer contempt or impatience:—

> "This earth of mine doth tremble, and I feel
> A stark affrighted motion in my blood;
> My soul grows weary of her house, and I
> All over am a trouble to myself.
> There is some hidden power in these dead things
> That calls my flesh unto 'em." (v. 4.)

A noble and pure soul, which wrecked itself upon the word "King," as that of Brutus upon the word "Freedom."

There could not be a contrast drawn with greater force than the opposition of character between Amintor and Evadne. For them there is no possible meeting-ground, they can no more understand one another than if they had been dwellers in different worlds. Evadne is bold and sensual; she professes indeed to love only with her ambition, yet "the hot and rising blood" in her cheeks prove that passion is not wanting to that love.

Conscience never crosses her path, and the scorn which rises to her lips at the mention of female chastity—

> "A maiden-head, Amintor,
> At my years!"

is unapproachable in its effrontery, except by her own shameless complaint of Amintor's baseness in "sowing dissension amongst lovers" by his malicious falsehoods. It has been justly remarked that in temperament she has a strong family likeness to her brother, she is "a female Melantius depraved by vicious love." The impudent boldness with which she avows to Amintor her purpose in making him her husband, is matched by her brother's soliciting of Calianax in the royal presence itself, and his brasen denials of the words which he has just uttered and which he immediately repeats; and in the conclusion of this latter scene there is thrown out a hint that this confidence is a quality which belongs to the whole family. How was such a woman to be brought to repentance? Amintor knows no way; but to Melantius from knowledge of himself comes an intuitive knowledge of her. There is no way but the way of violence and terror; she may be terrified into a repentance, which will be none the less sincere on that account. The interview between this brother and sister begins on her side with light raillery; she proceeds to indignation and threatening, and then falls back to hesitation and trifling, till Melantius, fairly roused to anger by an undutiful jest, draws sword upon her, and offers death if she speak less than the truth. Then at

last, after one fruitless cry for help, the proud spirit quails, and she reluctantly allows the truth to be dragged from her word by word, realizing every moment with more terrible clearness the depth of shame and misery to which she has fallen, till, moved half by resentment and half by terror, she takes the required oath to slay the lustful thief who has stolen from her the wealth of her maiden purity. Terrible pathos there is in the exclamation, when she is left alone :—

> "Oh, where have I been all this time? how friended,
> That I should lose myself thus desperately,
> And none for pity show me how I wandered?" (iv. 1.)

Fletcher has written no more powerful scene than this ; and in such single scenes lies his strength. To develop fully his tragic powers he needed a Beaumont always to direct their employment, to construct in due proportions the framework into which his work should be fitted.

Evadne is not less bold in her repentance than in her sin. Her steps are as unfaltering, her scorn as bitter, and her strokes as pitiless. With blood-stained hands and blood-stained dagger she rushes into the presence of Amintor, "loaden with events" and assured that this offering will be a glorious amends for all his wrongs. Bitterly she finds her error :—

> "Am I not fair?"
> "Looks not Evadne beauteous, with these rites now?
> Were those hours half so lovely in thine eyes,
> When our hands met before the holy man?
> I was too foul within to look fair then;
> Since I knew ill, I was not free till now." (v. 4.)

But in his eyes she is blacker now than ever before; to

her cry of "Joy to Amintor, for the king is dead," he can only reply:—

> "Why, thou hast raised up mischief to his height,
> And found one to outname thy other faults.
> Thou hast no intermission of thy sins,
> But all thy life is a continued ill:
> Black is thy colour now, disease thy nature.
> 'Joy to Amintor!' Thou hast touched a life,
> The very name of which had power to chain
> Up all my rage, and calm my wildest wrongs." (v. 4.)

Even yet she does not realize it, she still thinks that this *must* be the way to his love, and therefore she can never repent her act. After all, it had been undertaken not so much from desire to make amends for her wrong as from passionate eagerness to regain her lost place in his estimation. Incapable of a rational repentance, she could feel the sting of her brother's contempt, and her eyes had been opened to the nobleness and purity of Amintor, while she was piqued by his indifference. Slowly and reluctantly she realizes now that her sacrifice is rejected, that the one act of her life which seemed to herself supremely meritorious is set down as the crown of her course of ills. Nothing remains then but hopeless pleading to be forgiven, ended by a sudden stroke:—

> "Amintor, thou shalt love me now again;
> Go; I am calm. Farewell, and peace for ever!
> Evadne, whom thou hat'st, will die for thee;"

and with that she ends: but Amintor even then thinks not of her; his thoughts are on the woman whom he has wronged. Every trace of love for Evadne has long ago vanished from his heart, never to return.

The character of Evadne attracts our interest at least, if not our sympathy, in the most powerful manner. Of her it may be said truly that she has no capacity for virtue, and acts never from principle, always from passion and impulse. She has no conception of sin as a leprosy which clings; she knows of no crime which cannot be expiated by a heroic act of reparation. If she is to be turned from her course it must be by no appeal to higher principles, but by physical pain or physical terror, striking at her lower nature, till one passion supplants another and a violent impulse seizes her to recover herself in the estimation of brother or husband by some glorious revenge. Under good guidance she might do great things; and she can hardly go so far wrong that recovery is impossible, for force she has always, and conscience she never had; unlike those of weak impulses under the control of virtuous principle, who, if they once lose their virtue, can find no means of raising themselves again to their former level. But alas, her fate is bound up with one who can never be brought to an understanding of this, who has little faith in any conversion from such a course as hers, and no faith in a conversion which seems to be only marked by fresh developments of crime; one to whom vice is utterly abhorrent, as a thing which may possibly be repented of, but can never be entirely purged out of the soul. Yet, notwithstanding the utter contrast, there is a link between the situations of these two. Both do evil that good may come, and both suffer ruin in consequence. Amintor too easily persuades himself that the overstrained principle of loyalty ought to be

obeyed in a case where loyalty in fact was not concerned, rather than the plain obligation of fidelity to his plighted troth. Evadne, terrified by her brother's menaces, and stung by her husband's indifference to her after her repentance, is brought without difficulty to think that the means which seem likely to win back Amintor are those which are demanded for the expiation of her sin, and expects to purge her guilt by treacherously murdering her seducer. But neither Amintor nor justice could accept such an offering from such hands; she must die, but she does not die alone; there can be no nice distinctions of the degrees of guilt—the white-souled Amintor and the crime-loaden Evadne have alike sinned against the eternal laws, and alike must suffer.

Finally about Aspatia it is excusable to quote the remarks of Charles Lamb in those notes, too few, but all full of admirable appreciation, which he appended to his *Specimens of the Dramatists*:—

"One characteristic of the excellent old poets is their being able to bestow grace on subjects which naturally do not seem susceptible of any. I will mention two instances: Zelmane in the *Arcadia* of Sidney, and Helena in the *All's Well that Ends Well* of Shakspeare. . . . Aspatia in this tragedy is a character equally difficult with Helena. She too is a slighted woman, refused by the man who had once engaged to marry her. Yet it is artfully contrived that, while we pity her, we respect her, and she descends without degradation. So much true poetry and passion can do to confer dignity upon subjects which do not seem capable of it. But

Aspatia must not be compared at all points with Helena; she does not so absolutely predominate over her situation, but she suffers some diminution, some abatement of the full lustre of the female character, which Helena never does; her character has many degrees of sweetness, some of delicacy, but it has weakness, which, if we do not despise, we are sorry for; after all, Beaumont and Fletcher were but an inferior sort of Shakspeares and Sidneys."

But in fact the difference between Aspatia and Helena is that the latter is so absolutely sane and self-possessed throughout her trial that we hardly regard her as a sufferer. Weakness indeed she has none, but neither can she be said to have delicacy. A girl who entraps a man against his will to marry her, who gains admission to his bed only by personating a woman whom he intends to seduce, preserving throughout the whole transaction a spirit of cold calculation which leaves no room apparently for either love or grief, ought hardly to be compared with this Aspatia. The skill of Shakspere in investing Helena with some degree of grace may be admired the more because of the unpromising material with which he chose to deal, but in natural womanly feeling Helena is as deficient as she well can be. Aspatia had the promise fairly, loved as maiden betrothed is bound to love, and was broken-hearted when the object of her love proved false. No tricks, no devices, no plot—

> "Which, if it speed,
> Is wicked meaning in a lawful act;"

nothing in her soul but grief, helpless and hopeless, yet adorning itself with poetical and picturesque images of love and desertion, till the mind seems almost to give way, and she seeks death at the hand of the man who still loved her while he married another. For in fact her love was not unreturned: Amintor may have been dazzled for a moment by the physical beauty of Evadne, but in his heart he still loved Aspatia. We do not despise, we are not even sorry for her weakness; we think it both natural and beautiful, crowned as it is at last by his confession of love.*

* Waller's alternative fifth act of *The Maid's Tragedy*, in which the king is not killed, Evadne goes into a nunnery, and all ends happily, is incredibly bad; perhaps, considering its pretensions, the most ludicrous failure ever made by a writer of respectable name in literature. He does not seem to have had any suspicions of its inferiority to the rest; indeed he challenges comparison between the old and the new with not a little confidence, distinguishing his own share by the use of rhyme, which to him seems necessary to constitute "poetry." The author of the preface to the early collected edition of Waller's works evidently had some qualms, for while remarking that "it was agreeable to Mr. Waller's temper to soften the rigour of the tragedy, as he expresses it," he raises the pertinent question "whether it be agreeable to the nature of tragedy itself to make everything come off so easily."

It is evident from the variety of epilogues provided, that not only this version but several other variations were actually put on the stage, though there are indications here, as well as direct evidence elsewhere, that the original play was not altogether driven thence; and Waller's prologue mentions *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster* as the most popular old plays of that time.

As regards the reason of the alterations, Cibber observes that it was hardly likely that Charles II. feared the fate of the king in the tragedy, "it being well known that the ladies then in favour were not so nice in their notions as to think their preferment their dishonour, or their lover a tyrant. Besides, that easy monarch loved his roses without thorns, nor do we hear that he much chose to be himself the first gatherer of them." (*Apology*, p. 282, ed. 1750: quoted by Dyce.)

VII.

THE mock-heroic drama called *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is unquestionably a work of the very highest merit in its own class. Probably no play of its time is so genuinely humorous (in the modern sense of the word), and the humour is surprisingly little dependent upon temporary or local circumstances. Doubtless, in order to appreciate it fully, it is necessary to be acquainted with the class of writings which it is intended to ridicule, but the satire is in reality, like that of *Don Quixote*, aimed less at accidental peculiarities and extravagances than at follies which permanently exist in human nature, though at times they may be concealed. At its first production it was a failure, like *The Faithful Shepherdess* which immediately preceded it, but for very different reasons. Fletcher's "pastoral tragicomedy," with all its poetical beauty, was evidently unsuited to the stage, and, in spite of the abuse lavished by the author and his friends on the vulgar audience for misliking it, we feel that the audience judged more wisely than he. But no one will deny that *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is admirably suited for the stage, where it afterwards became a most popular entertainment, and we cannot doubt that some special

cause led to its original rejection. "The world," says the publisher, "for want of judgment, or not understanding the privy mark of irony about it (which showed it was no offspring of any vulgar brain), utterly rejected it." But the mark of irony is not so concealed that it can easily pass unnoticed even by the grosser intelligence, and it is far more likely that a keen perception of the satire stung the citizens to resentment, than that it altogether missed its mark. The following is the account given of it by Schlegel, who, in this instance at least, has shown a very just appreciation:—

"*The Knight of the Burning Pestle* of Beaumont and Fletcher is an incomparable and singular work in its kind. It is a parody of the chivalry romances; the thought is borrowed from *Don Quixote*, but the imitation is handled with freedom, and so particularly applied to Spenser's *Faery Queen* that it may pass for a second invention. But the peculiarly ingenious novelty of the piece consists in the combination of the irony of a chimerical abuse of poetry with another irony exactly the contrary, of the incapacity to comprehend any fable and the dramatic form more particularly. A grocer and his wife come as spectators to the theatre: they are discontented with the piece which has just been announced; they demand a play in honour of the corporation, and Ralph, their apprentice, is to act a principal part in it. They are well received; but still they are not satisfied, make their observations on everything, and incessantly address themselves to the players. Ben Jonson had already exhibited imaginary spectators, but they were

either benevolent expounders or awkward censurers of the views of the poet: consequently they always conducted his, the poet's, own cause. But the grocer and his wife represent a whole genus, namely those unpoetical spectators who are destitute of a feeling for art. The illusion with them becomes a passive error; the subject represented has all the effect of reality on them, they therefore resign themselves to the impression of each moment, and take part for or against the persons of the drama. On the other hand, they show themselves insensible to all genuine illusion, that is of entering vividly into the spirit of the fable: Ralph, however heroically and chivalrously he may conduct himself, is always for them Ralph their apprentice; and they take upon them, in the whim of the moment, to demand scenes which are quite inconsistent with the plan of the piece that has been commenced. In short, the views and demands with which poets are often oppressed by a prosaical public are personified in the most ingenious and amusing manner in these caricatures of spectators."*

It is a mistake to suppose that there is any special reference to Spenser's *Faery Queen*, but it was not perhaps to be expected that a foreign critic should be acquainted with the class of literature at which it was really aimed. It is surprising however that neither he nor any other critic should have perceived the probability that the satire of this play was the author's retort upon the public for a special offence; that it was in fact

* Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, translated by J. Black, vol. ii. p. 312.

Beaumont's revenge for the rejection of *The Faithful Shepherdess.* We know how strongly he felt upon the subject by his letter to Fletcher *Upon his "Faithful Shepherdess;"* and what better occasion can be suggested for this attack upon stupidity and want of poetical imagination in the audience of the theatres than the "murder" of his friend's admirable poem? As regards the date, all that we positively know is that it was published in 1613, having been two years in the hands of the publisher, to whom it was delivered originally not by the author, but by Robert Keysar, who may have had it for some time in his hands. The publisher states, also, that it had been treated as a child abandoned by its parents, and, moreover, that it was more than a year older than *Don Quixote,* meaning no doubt Shelton's translation, published in 1612. The play, then, may well have been acted in 1610, and *The Faithful Shepherdess* seems to have been produced in the early part of that year. If the publisher is correct in his statement that the burlesque was written in eight days, that fact makes it still more probable that it was put forth for a special occasion; and the motto from Horace, prefixed to the first edition,* seems to indicate clearly enough that the satire is chiefly aimed, not at the authors of absurd plays, but at the mechanic judgment of citizens,

* "Quodsi
Judicium subtile videndis artibus illud
Ad libros et ad hæc Musarum dona vocares,
Bœotum in crasso jurares aere natum."

It is possible, no doubt, that this was prefixed by the publisher, and intended to refer to the failure of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* itself.

who, acute enough in their own practical concerns, are incapable of appreciating a literary masterpiece.

The satire is aimed certainly at the city, and the special references are to a class of plays popular with the citizens and provided for them chiefly at the *Red Bull* * theatre, which either dealt with the exploits of city worthies, such as Whittington and Gresham; or, more absurdly, like Heywood's *Four Prentises of London*, represented citizens or their apprentices in the guise of knights of romance. Heywood's play, which is once mentioned by name and constantly alluded to in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, is conducted with most becoming gravity, and ought not to be suspected of any "privy mark of irony," though some critics have called it a comedy, and regarded it rather as the prototype than as the victim of Beaumont's burlesque. Nor does it seem to be true, as suggested by Dyce, that the author of it repented in later days; for though in the preface to the printed edition of 1615 he apologizes for the shortcomings of his play, on the ground that it was written many years since in his infancy of judgment, and that "as plays were then, some fifteen or sixteen years ago, it was in the fashion," yet these excuses seem to refer only to the want of "that accurateness, both of plot and style, that these more censorious days with greater curiosity require," and he dedicates it with most compli-

* The *Red Bull*, in the neighbourhood of Turnball Street, was one of the public theatres. It was not in very good repute, in which respect it ranked with the *Curtain* in Shoreditch Fields, and the *Cock-pit* in Drury Lane, on a distinctly lower level than the *Globe* and *Blackfriars*, where Shakespere, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Jonson were acted.

mentary gravity "to the honest and high-spirited Prentises, the readers." The absurdities of the play are sufficiently striking. It is opened by the "Old Earl of Boloign," who thus addresses his daughter :—

> "Daughter, thou seest how Fortune turns her wheel :
> We that but late were mounted up on high,
> Lulled in the skirts of that inconstant dame,
> Are now thrown headlong by her ruthless hand,
> To kiss that earth whereon our feet should stand.
> * * * * * *
> And I am forced to lose the name of Earl,
> And live in London like a citizen;
> My four sons are bound prentice to four trades ;
> Godfrey my eldest boy I have made a mercer ;
> Guy my next son enrolled in goldsmith's trade ;
> My third son Charles bound to a haberdasher ;
> Young Eustace is a grocer ; all highborn,
> Yet of the city-trades they have no scorn."
>
> (*Four Prentises of London*, i. 1.)

The four youths, however, all leave their masters, to join in the crusades, while avoiding all suspicion of scorning their trades by blazoning the arms of their respective companies on their knightly shields. After a considerable variety of adventures, in which the Soldan and Sophy both play a part, the drama, if such it can be called, concludes with the conquest of Jerusalem.

This play belongs to the closing years of the sixteenth century, but it had continued popular, and was the representative of a class. The same vices of the public taste which encouraged these performances are referred to long after by Ben Jonson, who doubtless sympathized heartily with Beaumont's satire : "If a child could be born in a play, and grow up to a man in the

first scene before he went off the stage: and then after to come forth as a squire, and be made a knight: and that knight to travel between the acts, and do wonders in the Holy Land or elsewhere: kill Paynims, wild boars, dun cows, and other monsters; beget him a reputation and marry an emperor's daughter for his mistress; convert her father's country; and at last come home lame, and all-to-be laden with miracles." (*Magnetic Lady*, act i., end.)

Whether Heywood was actually the chief offender it is difficult to say with certainty, but he was connected with the company which usually performed at the *Red Bull;* and another of his plays, *If You know not Me, You know Nobody*, seems to be alluded to by Beaumont. There may be references also to *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*, in which the chivalrous rescue of distressed damsels achieved at Mile End by the cripple of Fenchurch, and the style generally, which is often on or over the boundaries of burlesque, while apparently meant to be serious, remind us forcibly of the sayings and doings of Ralph.*

* *e.g.* "Then, Cripple, know I am not what I seem,
But took this habit to deceive my friend:
My friend indeed, but yet my cruel foe;
Foe to my good, my friend in outward show:
I am no porter, as I seem to be,
But younger brother to that Anthony;
And, to be brief, I am in love with Phillis,
Which my two elder brothers do affect;
* * * * *
Cripple, thou once did'st promise me thy love
When I did rescue thee in Mile-end Green,
Now is the time, now let me have thy aid,
To gull my brothers of the beauteous maid."

The style which is satirized is not indeed that which is commonly

Another production of the same author, which is possibly referred to in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, is *Edward IV.* Taking into account the many allusions to Heywood, we may perhaps suppose that this is the play alluded to under the title of *Jane Shore*, among those which were popular with the city. But there were others on the same subject possibly before and certainly shortly after Heywood's *Edward IV.* However the first part of that play, with many excellences, contains passages of 'prentice valour which may well have been in our author's mind.* In company with *Jane Shore* is mentioned *The Bold Beauchamps*, which was popularly attributed to Heywood, though it seems to have been in existence before he began writing for the stage.

The title was perhaps suggested by *The Knight of the Burning Rock*, which may have been a play of the

thought characteristic of Heywood, who achieved his greatest excellence in the kind of domestic drama which is represented by *A Woman killed with Kindness;* but Heywood was probably the most prolific writer of the day. He speaks himself, twenty years before his death, of having had either an entire hand or "a main-finger" in two hundred and twenty plays. Of these only some five and twenty have survived with his name attached to them, so that it is difficult to say to what extent the theatre may have been supplied by him with plays of the type of the *Four Prentises.* He was writing for the stage during nearly half a century; he professes himself careless of being read; and we may well suppose that in very much of his work he studied little beyond the satisfaction of the popular taste. That he should be the principal mark of Beaumont's satire may well surprise any one who knows him only by his better work.

* "Nay, scorn us not that we are 'prentices;
The Chronicles of England can report
What memorable actions we have done," etc.
(*Edward IV.*, pt. i. act i. scene 4.)

And the stage direction, "a very fierce assault on all sides, in which the apprentices do great service."

class which are satirized, but the title only has come down to us. However this may be, it is certain that the satire is not aimed only at such productions and the grocer knight-errantry which was their subject, but also at the general want of artistic perception in the vulgar audience, which led to the toleration and popularity of such farragoes of disconnected and improbable incidents of every kind as were current, under titles that might serve as tables of contents,* plays which conformed to rules "neither of decent civility nor skilful poetry," mere medleys without even the respectable merit of being true to nature. Against such, whether they dealt with tales of chivalry or no, the satirist makes war, and reasonably enough directs his attack against the public which demanded rather than the author who supplied.

From this point of view the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* may be regarded as expressing under the mask of irony some of the author's strongest artistic convictions, and as the prototype of *The Rehearsal* and *The Critic*, both of which are far less skilfully constructed. These later attempts exhibit the rehearsal of performances which are gross caricatures of anything that could ever

* *e.g.* "A lamentable tragedy mixed full of pleasant mirth, conteyning the Life of Cambises King of Percia, from the beginning of his kingdom, unto his death, his one good deed of execution, after that many wicked deeds and tirannous murders, committed by and through him, and last of all his odious death by God's justice appointed, in such order as followeth; by Thomas Preston." Or, "The first and second parts of King Edward the Fourth, containing his merie pastime with the Tanner of Tamworth, as also his love to fair Mistresse Shore; her great promotion, fall and miserie, and lastly the lamentable death of both her and her husband. Likewise the besieging of London by the Bastard Falconbridge, and the valiant defence of the same by the Lord Mayor and the citizens."

have been seriously put upon the stage, and the effect depends upon the extravagance of the nonsense and upon the personal allusions. This however conveys in its very construction the desired impression, and indicates at the same time the true source of the absurdities which it attacks. We see the citizen spectators, who occupy stools upon the stage, demand adventures without regard to the plot of the play presented:—

"*Cit.* Sirrah, boy! come hither. Let Ralph come in and fight with Jasper.

Wife. Ay, and beat him well; he's an unhappy boy.

Boy. Sir, you must pardon us; the plot of our play lies contrary, and 'twill hazard the spoiling of our play.

Cit. Plot me no plots! I'll ha' Ralph come out; I'll make your house too hot for you else.

Boy. Why, sir, he shall; but if anything fall out of order, the gentlemen must pardon us." (ii. 4.)

And we are to understand thereby that the public taste, and not the theatres or those who write for them, is to blame for the want of artistic construction which was visible in the popular drama of the day. We are reminded of the temper of the audience which rejected the *Faithful Shepherdess*, how they expected it to be "a play of country-hired shepherds in gray cloaks, with curtailed dogs in strings, sometimes laughing together, and sometimes killing one another; and, missing Whitsun-ales, cream, wassail, and morris-dances, began to be angry."* And there is a passage quoted by Collier from Edmund Gayton's *Festivous Notes on Don Quixote*, published in 1654, which proves that, on some occasions

* Fletcher's Preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess.*

at least, the audiences took the matter into their own hands with as little ceremony as the worthy citizen of Beaumont's burlesque :—

"Men come not to study at a playhouse, but love such expressions and passages which with ease insinuate themselves into their capacities. *Lingua*, that learned comedy of the contention betwixt five senses for the superiority, is not to be prostituted to the common stage, but it is only proper for an academy: to bring them *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, *Green's Tu Quoque*, *The Devil of Edmonton*, and the like; or if it be on holidays, when Sailors, Watermen, Shoemakers, Butchers, and Apprentices, are at leisure, then it is good policy to amaze those violent spirits with some tearing tragedy full of fights and skirmishes, as the *Guelphs and Ghibbelines*, *Greeks and Trojans*, or *The three London Apprentices*, which commonly ends in six acts, the spectators frequently mounting the stage, and making a more bloody catastrophe among themselves than the players did. I have known upon one of these festivals, but especially at Shrovetide, when the players have been appointed, notwithstanding their bills to the contrary, to act what the major part of the company had a mind to; sometimes *Tamerlaine*, sometimes *Jugurth*, sometimes *The Jew of Malta*, and sometimes parts of all these; and at the last, none of the three taking, they were forced to undress and put off their tragic habits, and conclude the day with *The Merry Milkmaids*. And unless this were done, and the popular humour satisfied, as sometimes it so fortuned that the players were refractory,

the benches, the tiles, the laths, the stones, the oranges, apples, nuts, flew about most liberally; and as there were mechanics of all professions, who fell every one to his own trade, and dissolved a house in an instant, and made a ruin of a stately fabric. It was not then the most mimical nor fighting man, Fowler nor Andrew Cane, could pacify: prologues nor epilogues would prevail; the devil and the fool were quite out of favour." *

A point worth observing in the present play is that, in spite of the ironical character of the whole, and in spite of the interpolation of Ralph and his chivalrous adventures, there is worked out nevertheless from beginning to end a little domestic drama possessing some quiet interest of its own, of which the characters with one exception are serious, and containing tender vows of true love such as the author might have put into the mouths of his Ricardo and Viola, and lyrics worthy of the age to which they belong. This not only serves as a foil to the windy knight-errantry by which it is surrounded, but suggests the soundness and simplicity of the groundwork on which the popular demand reared such monstrous erections, while furnishing at the same time interest to the audience and material for the honest citizen and his spouse to exercise their criticism and display their sympathies. In these they are naturally somewhat narrow and unimaginative. They bring into the theatre all their class prejudices and all their prudent thriftiness. They are the natural enemies of romance. They sympathize, not with the devoted lover who is pre-

* Collier, *Annals of the Stage*, iii. 417.

sumptuous enough to wish to marry his master's daughter, but with the wealthy suitor provided for the damsel by her father; and they soon become suspicious of the intentions of the playwright in this respect. "Well, I'll be hanged for a halfpenny if there be not some abomination knavery in this play!" They take the side naturally of the thrifty Mistress Merrythought against her easy-tempered husband and her romantic son:—

> "*Wife.* It's a foolish old man this; is not he, George?
> *Cit.* Yes, cony.
> *Wife.* Give me a penny i' the purse while I live, George.
> *Cit.* Ay, by lady, cony, hold thee there!" (i. 4.)

And, when Jasper makes the most dutiful reply to his mother's objurgations, the comment is:—

"Ungracious child, I warrant him; hark how he chops logic with his mother! Thou hadst best tell her she lies; do, tell her she lies."

The events upon the stage are as real to them as anything in daily life: "truth is truth" to them whether on the stage or off, and they are ready to bear witness of the occurrences which they have seen, and expect the gentlemen and musicians to come forward and corroborate their evidence:—

"*Wife.* No, indeed, Mistress Merrythought; tho' he be a notable gallows, yet I'll assure you his master did turn him away, even in this place; 'twas, i' faith, within this half-hour, about his daughter; my husband was by.

Cit. Hang him, rogue! he served him well enough: love his master's daughter! By my troth, cony, if there were a thousand boys, thou would'st spoil them all with taking their part; let his mother alone with him.

Wife. Ay, George, but yet truth is truth." (i. 4.)

It is chiefly the personal interest which they take in

their apprentice that carries them through the performance :—

"Sirrah, you scurvy boy, bid the players send Ralph ; or by God's [wounds], an they do not, I'll tear some of their perriwigs beside their heads ; this is all riff-raff." (i. 4.)

And his sound protestantism delights them no less than his chivalrous exploits :—

"*Ralph.* I am a knight of a religious order,
And will not wear the favour of a lady
That trusts in Antichrist and false traditions.
Cit. Well said, Ralph ! convert her if thou canst." (iv. 2.)

In short they are admirable impersonations of the taste of the city ; and the garrulous egotism of the woman is well matched with the self-sufficient and purse-proud fault-finding of the man ; while at times they are made the vehicle for satire against other classes than their own, as in the following passage :—

"*Ralph.* And certainly those knights are much to be commended, who, neglecting their possessions, wander with a squire and a dwarf through the deserts to relieve poor ladies.

Wife. Ay, by my faith, are they, Ralph ; let 'em say what they will, they are indeed. Our knights neglect their possessions well enough, but they do not the rest." (i. 3.)

The burlesque of Ralph's part is admirable, but hardly an exaggeration of the serious sayings and doings of the "Four Prentises." The demand that he shall kill a lion is connected with the boast of Charles (the haberdasher) :—

"Since first I bore this shield I quartered it
With this Red Lion, whom I singly once
Slew in the forest."

(*Four Prentises of London.*)

The design upon Ralph's shield in remembrance of his former trade is suggested by that of Eustace (the grocer) :—

> "Upon this shield I bear the Grocers' arms,
> Unto which trade I was enrolled and bound."*

And the demand that Ralph shall "come out on May day in the morning and speak upon a conduit" reminds us of the complaint of the same Eustace :—

> "He will not let me see a mustering,
> Nor in a May-day morning fetch in May."

Ralph is allowed to "fetch in May" with much distinction, and the speech delivered by him on that occasion "upon a conduit" has graphic touches which convince us of its truth, and as an illustrative document deserves to be extracted :—

> [illegible]ondon, to thee I do present the merry month of May;
> Let each true subject be content to hear me what I say.
> For from the top of Conduit-Head, as plainly may appear,
> I will both tell my name to you, and wherefore I am here.
> My name is Ralph, by due descent, though not ignoble I,
> Yet far inferior to the flock of gracious grocery:
> And by the common counsel of my fellows in the Strand,
> With gilded staff and crossèd scarf the May-lord here I stand.
> Rejoice, oh English hearts, rejoice, rejoice oh lovers dear;
> Rejoice, oh city, town and country, rejoice eke every shere!
> For now the fragrant flowers do spring and sprout in seemly sort,
> The little birds do sit and sing, the lambs do make fine sport;
> And now the birchin tree doth bud, that makes the schoolboy cry;
> The morris rings, while hobby-horse doth foot it feateously;
> The lords and ladies now abroad, for their disport and play,
> Do kiss sometimes upon the grass, and sometimes in the hay.

* The members of the Company of Grocers seem to have been much attached to the device in question. Lawrence Sheriffe for example, the founder of Rugby School, ordered that it should be constantly used in connexion with his "charity."

Now butter with a leaf of sage is good to purge the blood,
Fly Venus and phlebotomy, for they are neither good.
Now little fish on tender stone begin to cast their bellies,
And sluggish snails, that erst were mewed, do creep out of their shellies.
The rumbling rivers now do warm for little boys to paddle,
The sturdy steed now goes to grass, and up they hang his saddle.
The heavy hart, the bellowing buck, the rascal and the pricket
Are now among the yeoman's pease, and leave the fearful thicket.
And be like them, oh you, I say, of this same noble town,
And lift aloft your velvet heads, and slipping off your gown,
With bells on legs, and napkins clean unto your shoulders tied,
With scarfs and garters as you please, and 'hey for our town' cried,
March out and shew your willing minds, by twenty and by twenty,
To Hogsdon or to Newington, where ale and cakes are plenty;
And let it ne'er be said for shame, that we, the youths of London,
Lay thrumming of our caps at home, and left our custom undone.
Up then, I say, both young and old, both man and maid a-Maying,
With drums and guns that bounce aloud, and merry tabor playing!
Which to prolong, God save our king, and send his country peace,
And root out treason from the land! and so, my friends, I cease."

(iv. 5.)

The character of old Merrythought and his relations with his wife are conceived in an excellent vein of humour, and the effect is much heightened by the ingenious manner in which the fragments of old ballads are employed. On the whole, this play is one which may be commended to the reader for its laughter-moving power, whether we are inclined or not to assent to the opinion of an accomplished editor of Beaumont and Fletcher, who, after criticising "the five masterpieces" of our authors, adds that, admirable as these are, "perhaps *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* exceeds them in one particular—dramatical (distinguished from theatrical) merit. It is composed with an art almost equal to Ben Jonson's; with nativer and mellower humour,

though less caustic. The characters are depicted forcibly and naturally, and consistently from first to last: none by Shakspere are better sustained than those of the Citizen and his Wife, who patronize a play in the plenitude of their purse-pride, and insist on their shopman Ralph being let to perform the chief part, to cut every gordian knot like an Alexander the Great, and to come forward as a 'Dominus do-all' whenever they please to see him. . . . Butler must have owed as much to *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* as this did to *Don Quixote*." * Apart from the question of its artistic merits it may be doubted whether any play of the period gives a more vivid representation of citizen manners than we have here in the worthy couple who occupy stools upon the stage.

* Darley's Introduction to his edition, p. xlvii.

VIII.

A King and No King was first acted in the year 1611, and seems to have enjoyed very great popularity throughout the century succeeding its production. Then it practically disappeared from the stage, though Garrick contemplated a revival of it, and caused it to be several times rehearsed by his company, and though it was afterwards once acted at Covent Garden Theatre, January 14, 1788. On this occasion it seems not to have been favourably received, and perhaps if it were produced now it would hardly be tolerated. Yet it is a work of startling power, vigorous in conception and in delineation of character, containing hardly a line which does not contribute to the effect of the whole, and admirable for the skill with which its various strands are twisted into a single cord. Still more surprising is it as the work, for the most part, of a writer who was even yet little more than a youth, a man of five or six and twenty, an age at which Shakspere had hardly begun to write independently for the stage, at which Chapman, Fletcher, Massinger, and Ford had, so far as we know, produced nothing dramatic.*

* It is perhaps worth remarking that the dates on pp. 88–100 of Mr. Fleay's *Shakespeare Manual* are not wholly to be depended on. Chapman

The nearest parallel among dramatists of the period to such early maturity is afforded by Marlowe, who wrote *Tamburlane* at twenty-one and *Faustus* at twenty-three.

Looking merely at the power with which the subject is treated we should have no hesitation in calling this the masterpiece of Beaumont and Fletcher; but the choice of subject itself is open to grave objections, and the catastrophe is seriously defective. Seeing that much of our criticism will have reference to this, it is perhaps necessary first to follow the development of the plot up to that point.

Arbaces, king of Iberia, a valiant but vain-glorious monarch, has conquered his rival, Tigranes, and is bringing him home with vaunts which the pride of his noble captive can ill endure, and which provoke the reproof of the honest Mardonius, companion in arms to this arrogant sovereign. In his insolent generosity he offers in marriage to Tigranes his sister, the Princess Panthea, whom, owing to long wars abroad, he has for years not seen: an offer which the proud prisoner rejects with becoming disdain:—

> "Perhaps I have a love, where I have fixed
> Mine eyes, not to be moved, and she on me:
> *I* am not fickle."

Arbaces is nothing if not fickle, and displays a marvellous alternation of humours, bursts of passion and arrogant bragging, followed rapidly by self-humiliation and

is there said to have been born in 1589, and to have begun work in 1597. The date of Fletcher's birth is given as 1576, and of Beaumont's 1589.

remorse. But we are to understand that this sovereign, victorious abroad, has troubles at home. Aranê, the queen-mother, has plotted repeatedly against the life of the king, and repeatedly has been pardoned. On the other hand, we hear that his sister Panthea, whom he last saw as a child of nine years old before his wars began, prays daily and nightly for his safe return, and

> "stains her cheeks
> With mourning tears, to purge her mother's ill."

Of her beauty, grace and virtue the king receives the most glowing reports from Gobrias, the lord-protector of the kingdom during his absence, and he sets this comfort against his mother's hate. He returns to his kingdom: Panthea comes forth to greet him, and kneels for his favour and blessing. At first sight of her he is seized by a passion for her which he struggles with but cannot control, showing itself outwardly in violent denials of the relationship, which are quite unaccountable to the bystanders and to her:—

> "She is no kin to me, nor shall she be;
> If she were any, I create her none:
> And which of you can question this? My power
> Is like the sea, that is to be obeyed,
> And not disputed with: I have decreed her
> As far from having part of blood with me
> As the naked Indians. Come and answer me,
> He that is boldest now; is that my sister?" (iii. 1.)

The honourable entertainment of Tigranes is changed to harsh confinement because he has shown himself momentarily affected by the present charms of his lately promised bride. Panthea, first cruelly denied by

her brother to her unspeakable distress, is suddenly adored by him as a goddess :—

> "My hope, my only jewel of my life,
> The best of sisters,"

and then as abruptly ordered away to prison ;—

> "For she has given me poison in a kiss,—
> She had it 'twixt her lips."

Unable to conquer his guilty passion, he with difficulty reveals it to Mardonius. That confidant however indignantly refuses to have any part in the evil business :—

"You must understand, nothing that you can utter can remove my love and service from my prince ; but otherwise, I think I shall not love you more, for you are sinful ; and if you do this crime, you ought to have no laws, for, after this, it will be great injustice in you to punish any offender for any crime." (iii. 3.)

The king finds a very different hearer in the bragging coward Bessus, whose too ready acquiescence however causes him to see his own sin in a new light, and to shrink back in horror from the flatterer who has with complacency accepted his own evil suggestions :—

> "Thou art too wicked for my company,
> Though I have hell within me : Away, I say,
> I will not do this sin." (iii. 3.)

The fourth act however contains a dangerous interview between Arbaces and Panthea, to whom he confesses his love, beseeching her not to encourage it, though the penalty for refusal must be banishment for ever from his sight. She weeps and prays for him, wishing for his sake and her own that he were no brother to her :—

"Is there no stop" (he cries)
"To our full happiness, but these mere sounds,
Brother and sister?
Panth. There is nothing else:
But these, alas, will separate us more
Than twenty worlds betwixt us!
Arb. I have lived
To conquer men, and now am overthrown
Only by words, brother and sister. Where
Have those words dwelling? I will find 'em out,
And utterly destroy 'em; but they are
Not to be grasped: let them be men or beasts,
And I will cut them from the earth; or towns,
And I will rase them and then blow them up;
Let them be seas, and I will drink them off,
And yet have unquenched fire left in my breast—
Let 'em be anything but merely voice." (iv. 4.)

His passion grows in the presence of Panthea, while even she is not quite unmoved, and crying for the mercy of a prison or death for herself, urges him to escape by flight.

The passions have been wrought to the climax, and the fifth act threatens ruin. Arbaces is desperate, and resolved to batter down hell's gate,

"and find the place
Where the most damned have dwelling."

He will murder Gobrias first, as the cause of his trouble by reason of those "witching letters" extolling the beauty of Panthea, which he had sent to him while abroad,—

"So that I doted
Something before I saw her;"

and then he will rush to "that incestuous ravishing," and end his life and sins by a forbidden blow upon himself.

The impending catastrophe is averted by a discovery for which by hints in the earlier part of the play the attentive spectator may have been in some degree prepared. Aranê is not after all his mother: Panthea is not his sister: Gobrias was in the secret, and his letters had been actually intended to produce the result which followed from them. Panthea is the lawful sovereign and Arbaces is proved "no king," a discovery which opens the way to happiness for him and for her, and procures liberty for Tigranes, whose true love has followed him in disguise and secured him by her presence against the attractions of Panthea. The relations of these lovers form one of the minor threads of the plot, while an underplot of much humour is afforded by the character and exposure of the coward-braggart Bessus, the comic masterpiece of our author.

Such are the rather unpromising materials from which this striking play is constructed, and critics are certainly to some extent justified in their complaint that there is a deficiency of morality in the catastrophe. "The terrific power of passion" which has been exhibited requires, they say, a stern "vindication of law" instead of "the healing power of an accident." In some of their strictures the modern critics are anticipated more or less by Rymer,* whose virulences of attack upon Shakspere and our authors in the interests of the classical drama remain a monument of perverse ingenuity, in which the very wrongheadedness of the criticism sometimes suggests

* *Tragedies of the Last Age considered, etc.*, by Thomas Rymer, pp. 56–103.

to the reader previously unnoticed merits in the works with which the critic deals. On *A King and No King*, in company with *Othello*, he bestows some of his most violent animadversions. "The ancients," he says, "took an incestuous love in the fall." "Arbaces should have pined away without disclosure." "The ancients never palliated a crime before it was committed." In most of these points however his standard of reference, the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, comes out as badly as the "tragedies of the last age." Phædra reveals herself, and her conceived crime is palliated in advance to a far greater extent than that of Arbaces, by the plea of the anger of Aphrodité. The crime of Arbaces is in fact not palliated beforehand at all, but mitigated afterwards by the discovery that he is the victim of a plot. Yet notwithstanding his perverse method of criticism, perhaps Rymer was after all right in his contention that the modern drama differs materially from the ancient in its manner of treating this particular subject; the complaint indeed is repeated by a French critic of our own days,* who declares that our fiction is no longer content with simple emotions, but delights in "amours singuliers et raffinés," and that "passion boldly rebels against duty, and the exception endeavours to substitute itself for the rule." The suggestion of incest is in itself unpleasant, yet it has undoubted attractions for the modern dramatist, and that on a very intelligible principle. The "ancients," with whom for obvious reasons love was not one of the scenic emotions, resorted constantly to

* St.-Marc Girardin, *Cours de Littérature Dramatique.*

murders committed among near relations, in order to produce the degree of horror which was considered essential to tragedy. Aristotle even reduced this practice to a rule: "If an enemy kills or purposes to kill an enemy, in neither case is any commiseration raised in us, beyond what necessarily arises from the nature of the action itself. The case is the same when the persons are neither friends nor enemies. But when such disasters happen between friends—when, for instance, the brother kills or is going to kill his brother, the son his father, the mother her son, or the reverse—these, and others of a similar kind, are the proper incidents for the poet's choice." * To produce the same circumstances of horror where love is the motive of the drama, the writer has recourse naturally and almost necessarily to the parallel situation. Nothing supplies the necessary strength of emotion combined with the necessary horror of the crime so completely as an incestuous passion. That the force of this combined fascination and repulsion was not unfelt even by the Greeks, is manifest from the treatment of the subject in the *Hippolytus;* and it may plausibly be argued that this conflict of human passions with the primary laws of society might conceivably be a finer subject for tragedy than the struggles of youthful love against accidental hindrances in a *Romeo and Juliet*; and that the humbling of the monarch whose power is as the sea, to be obeyed not to be reasoned with, by the discovery that he is the slave of his own passions, might be as pathetic, and as legitimately brought about, as the fall

* *Aristot. Poetics*, Bk. ii. ch. xiv. (Twining's translation).

of an Œdipus by the overmastering power of fate. To this it can only be replied that suggestions which are unpleasant to the unsophisticated sense are not consistent with artistic perfection, and ought to be avoided. Whether they are pernicious as well as offensive depends upon the method of treatment, which may easily be such as to incur the censure above quoted upon exceptions which endeavour to substitute themselves for the rule. Probably in this respect the nineteenth century ought to be thought more guilty than the seventeenth, and the elegant romance of Chateaubriand,* notwithstanding its edifying purpose, may well seem more pernicious to the cause of morality than the productions of the English stage.

We may however reasonably complain of a want of poetical justice in the case of Arbaces. It is true that those who cry out for poetical justice are often taking a somewhat narrow view of the functions of the dramatic art, as if it were bound always to provide judges and hangmen for the criminals whom it exhibits. The best art is moral, but in the same sense as nature is moral; and nature, so far as man is concerned, is "moralized" partly by the capacity of human beings for remorse, and for its opposite, the calm of a good conscience. Killing is a vulgar kind of justice compared with the misery of lawless lust, and this, it may be said, is sufficiently displayed in Arbaces. The meditated crime is not rendered attractive to the spectator or to the reader by the manner in which it is treated; and that is more than can be said of the actually committed crime in Ford's tragedy which

* *René* in the *Génie du Christianisme.*

deals with a partly similar subject, though that has poetical justice enough of the killing kind. It may be argued that if the moral sense is not shocked by Œdipus punished for parricide and incest committed against his will and without the knowledge of what he was doing, why should it object to the escape from punishment of Arbaces on making the opposite discovery, that that to which he had been tempted was not after all a crime. In the former case the catastrophe is moralized by the inward peace of the *Coloneus;* in the latter, all that is required to balance the unmerited happiness of the conclusion is found, it may be argued, in the misery and self-abhorrence which accompanied or followed the half-formed intention. And this reasoning would be to some extent sound. If the remorse of Arbaces had survived the discovery, we might have accepted it as a sufficient retribution. The defect from a moral point of view is that an accidental discovery that the material conditions are not such as had been supposed is taken by Arbaces as an absolution from his guilt, with which in fact it has little or nothing to do. The guilt consisted in the intention to commit sin, and the character of this intention could not be affected by any subsequent discovery. We have here in fact an example of the material view of morality which is occasionally taken by our authors, and from which even Shakspere is not entirely free. The moral defect of *Measure for Measure* seems to be the absolution accorded to Angelo because he happens not to have actually done the deed which he intended to do and thought he had done; the moral defect of *All's Well*

that Ends Well, indicated even in its title, is the dismissal of the profligate and ungenerous Bertram to happiness, because he has in the dark mistaken one woman for another. Something of the same feeling reversed there is in the horror of an Œdipus or a Lucretia at deeds which they have done either unwitting or enforced, and it is the complaint of Coleridge against Fletcher's Lucina that she regards her chastity as a material thing, which can be taken from her by an act of violence ; but in these latter cases we cannot but feel that the error is in the right direction, and it attracts our sympathy. A similar failure of moral perception disgusts us when it manifests itself on the opposite side. We cannot feel that Arbaces has earned his happy abdication, or expiated sufficiently his contemplated crime, of which indeed he has not even repented. One consideration alone saves this management of the catastrophe from utter condemnation. The fact that he has been really the victim of a plot may in some degree justly palliate his offence in our eyes as well as in his own.

But while allowing the criticism on the catastrophe, we cannot admit what is alleged against the general structure :—"We blunder along without the least streak of light, till in the last act we stumble on the plot lying all in a lump together." * It did not of course occur to Rymer that the unexpectedness of the final discovery—so far as it is unexpected, for several streaks of light have been afforded to us before—may be rather a merit than a defect. The "ancients," indeed, did not find it easy to

* *Tragedies of the Last Age, etc.*, p. 59.

conceal the catastrophe, for their plots were familiar to the spectators beforehand : but in our times judicious concealment is thought no blemish. A better critic, Dryden, in his introduction to *Troilus and Cressida*, calls this play " the best of its authors' designs, the most approaching to antiquity, and the most conducing to move pity," though how it comes to have this last merit he seems to be at a loss to understand.

The character of Arbaces, " vainglorious and humble, and angry and patient, and merry and dull, and joyful and sorrowful in extremity in an hour," (thus he is described by Mardonius), is the centre of interest, and has not been allowed to run to extravagance, but preserves always a consistency of inconsistency which makes it both intelligible and interesting. A man naturally of strong passions, but withal of a noble and generous disposition, placed in a position where his power is absolute, and surrounded by flatterers whose praise he despises yet cannot dispense with, has become by degrees an imperious egotist, who can hardly conceive any greatness in the universe except his own, or any possible restraint from without or from within upon any one of his humours or passions. While boasting himself over his conquered enemy he really imagines himself to be acting with the utmost magnanimity, and with genuine astonishment learns that his, as he thinks unparalleled, generosity is received as an insult. His own prowess is to him so obvious a fact that to mention it is no boasting :

" Be you my witness, earth,
Need I to brag? Doth not this captive prince

Speak me sufficiently, and all the acts
That I have wrought upon his suffering land?
Should I then boast? Where is that foot of ground
Within his whole realm, that I have not passed
Fighting and conquering? Far, then, from me
Be ostentation. I could tell the world,
How I have laid his kingdom desolate
By this sole arm, propt by divinity;
Stript him of all his glories; and have sent
The pride of all his youth to people graves;
And made his virgins languish for their loves;
If I would brag. Should I, that have the power
To teach the neighbour-world humility,
Mix with vainglory?" (i. 1.)

His is the very midsummer madness of vainglory, and when it produces at length an impatient reply from Mardonius, passion succeeds, and he alternately rages against those who would confine his words, and loses himself in wonder at his own patience of such offences from his subjects. Alone with his friend he shows the better side of his nature, and after a single outbreak humbles himself to the confession :—

"I have been
Too passionate and idle; thou shalt see
A swift amendment. But I want those parts
You praise me for: I fight for all the world!
Give thee a sword, and thou wilt go as far
Beyond me as thou art beyond in years." (i. 1.)

And the change which follows from raging fury to the bantering familiarity of comrades in arms is graceful enough. Our sympathies are further drawn to him by his behaviour to his supposed mother, who is plotting against his life because he is not really her son. Against her he will use no force—

"The hand of Heaven is on me: be it far
From me to struggle! if my secret sins
Have pulled this curse upon me, lend me tears
Enow to wash me white, that I may feel
A childlike innocence within my breast:" (i. 1.)

The prayer has a note of irony to the ears of those who feel already how far he is destined to fall from childlike innocence, and how soon.

When Panthea greets him on his return and he feels the guilty passion rising in his breast, he endeavours to deal with it as he would with his own subjects.

"I know thou fear'st my words; away!"

is the impotent command of a tyrant who has yet to learn that his passions are not his slaves, but he theirs; and then follow the struggles, magnificent even in their impotence, against the stubborn fact which alone of all things round will not obey him, and his moods change abruptly from imperious harshness to the humblest self-abasement, and back to harshness again.

The merits of the scene in which discovery is made to Mardonius do not belong especially to the character of Arbaces. Critics have expressed admiration of its skilful development, as evidencing the "power of detaining the spectator in that anxious suspense which creates almost an actual illusion, and makes him tremble at every word, lest the secret which he has learnt should be imparted to the imaginary person on the stage,"* a power which is displayed by the Greek dramatists abundantly, but rarely by Shakspere, except in *Othello*. We

* Hallam, *Literature of Europe*, vol. iii. p. 101.

must not omit to notice the conclusion of this scene, a masterpiece of dramatic power. The character of Arbaces, lawless but not ignoble, is revealed to us as by a lightning flash, when we see him attempt to seduce others to serve him in villany, and yet start back with abhorrence when the villany of his own suggestion stands before him in concrete shape. The eagerness of his instrument to perform his bidding brings to him such a revelation of himself as Nathan's parable brought to David, and for the first time he sees his sin as hideous as it really is.

Henceforth he fights against the passion as against a deadly foe, a curse laid upon him to scourge his pride; and humbled he is at last, by the startling and terrible discovery that the monarch whom all obey is not necessarily master of himself. This is the tragic moment of the play; already to himself he is proved no king. But the ruin, if ruin there is to be, shall bring down all with it; he at least will not survive his defeat. Through such wild resolves he passes to the discovery which sets all things again in order; and here too the alternations of mood are both striking and true. At first he cannot wait for the tale to be told out without turning on his supposed mother with violent rage; but when at last he suffers himself to hear enough to understand his mistake, when at last the thought occurs that perchance this sister of his may prove no sister, a sudden violent patience seizes upon him, as much overstrained as all his moods :—

> "I'll lie, and listen here as reverently
> As to an angel: if I breathe too loud,
> Tell me; for I would be as still as night."

And then, when it is over:—

> "And have you made an end now? Is this all?
> If not, I will be still till I be aged,
> Till all my hairs be silver.
> *Gobr.* This is all.
> *Arb.* And is it true, say you too, madam?
> *Aran.* Yes; Heaven knows it is most true.
> *Arb. Panthea, then, is not my sister.*" (v. 4.)

That is the thought which has kept him still, though no word of it has been said directly by any one; and he at once calls upon all the world to hear him proclaim himself no king, and to see him act his part with an exaggerated humility which is at once most genuine and admirably characteristic: nor less so his forgetting his place even before the new queen is brought in, to set Tigranes free without ransom, and to promise unheard-of magnificence for his home return.

The character of Mardonius is excellent as a foil to that of his sovereign. He is a good example of a type which was rather a favourite with our authors and their contemporaries, the blunt soldier who is loyal but cannot tune his tongue to flattery. Of this type is Aecius in *Valentinian*, but Mardonius has a well-marked individuality of his own. Combined with genuine admiration of the many good points in his master, he has a humorous appreciation of his defects of temper:—"If this hold, it will be an ill world for chambermaids and postboys. I thank heaven I have none but his letters patent, things of his own inditing." And he meets threats with the most absolute indifference, merely warning his sovereign that in putting him to death he would be destroying the

only man who would dare to tell him of his follies and to draw forth his virtues from the "flood of humours" in which they were drowned:—

> "No, cut my head off:
> Then you may talk, and be believed, and grow worse,
> And have your too self-glorious temper rocked
> Into a deep sleep, and the kingdom with you,
> Till foreign swords be in your throats, and slaughter
> Be everywhere about you, like your flatterers.
> Do, kill me." (iv. 2.)

We are reminded of Kent's exhortation—

> "Kill your physician and the fee bestow
> Upon the sore disease."

But Lear is a more intractable master than even Arbaces. The apology—

> "But I am racked clean from myself: bear with me,
> Wo't thou bear with me, good Mardonius?"

shows us the king in his better mood, but it is nevertheless the appeal of the weaker and more passionate nature to the stronger and calmer.

It remains only to bestow a passing notice on the humorous elements of the play. The connection between these and the main plot, between the character of Arbaces and that of Bessus, does not seem to have been remarked, but it is in its way admirable and artistic. The relation of the characters is one both of likeness and of contrast. Both are consummate braggarts; one, it is true, with some reason, and the other with less than none; for while Arbaces has his head turned by the real greatness of his position and achievements, Bessus

has done nothing except by accident, and is in fact the rankest of cowards. But as an egotist he is really a parallel to his sovereign, his boasting is a comic counterpart to that of Arbaces: and while he helps to exhibit the extravagant self-laudation of the king in a more ridiculous light, he is employed also by the dramatist as an instrument to reveal by his moral insensibility the enormity of the course on which Arbaces is resolved. Boastful without valour, and ready to commit crime without passion, he has some of the vices of the king's character in their most contemptible form, and materially conduces to the due moral appreciation of them. But apart from this, Bessus is the most amusing coward-braggart on the stage, for Falstaff will not properly come under this category. That inimitable character, so admirable in the variety and depth of its humour, is no mere boasting coward, nay, we are tempted to deny the cowardice altogether; such as it is, it carries with it our sympathy as no vulgar cowardice ever can. Bessus is no Falstaff, but it would be almost equally unjust in another direction to set him on a level with Parolles. Parolles is amusing (we may venture to say so much in spite of Charles Lamb), and his exposure is satisfactorily complete, but the humour of Bessus is certainly far superior, from "Bessus' Desperate Redemption" to "a little butter, friend, a little butter; butter and parsley is a sovereign matter." Every reader will remember the report of the king's exploits with the king's part left out, or taken rather by the valiant captain Bessus; and his voucher for the character of his charge, "Your grace shall

understand I am secret in these businesses, and know how to defend a lady's honour." Leigh Hunt, who was capable of appreciating the humorous parts of the play, though apparently he could not see its serious merits, extracts the conversation between Bessus and the swordsmen for his book of selections from Beaumont and Fletcher, and it is worth while to quote from his *Wit and Humour* the passage which refers to this scene:* "The pretended self-deception with which a coward lies to his own thoughts, the necessity for support, which induces him to apply to others as cowardly as himself for the warrant of their good opinion, and the fascinations of vanity which impel such men to the exposure which they fancy they have taken the subtlest steps to guard against, are most entertainingly set forth in the interview of Bessus with the two bullies, and the subsequent catastrophe at the hand of Bacurius. The nice balance of distinction and difference in which the bullies pretend to weigh the merits of kicks and beatings, and the impossibility which they affect of a shadow of imputation against their valour, or even of the power to assume it hypothetically, are masterly plays of wit of the first order."

* *Wit and Humour*, p. 174.

IX.

IN the work which has just been criticised, though the power is undiminished, perhaps even increased, we have been compelled to observe some unmistakable signs of decadence; and it is commonly thought that our authors especially represent the decline of the great dramatic age. This opinion is no doubt to some extent justifiable, but it must not be accepted without drawing one distinction. Fletcher, though the older of the two, had his period of greatest activity later, and fairly enough represents the generation of dramatists which succeeded to that of Shakspere; but Beaumont, whose life lies entirely within that of Shakspere, and who, like Shakspere, seems to have produced little or nothing for the stage during two or three years before his death, belonged by the natural bent of his genius to the older school, and all his works lie within what we must perforce call the great age, for we can hardly deny that title to the years which saw the production of *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, and *A Winter's Tale*. But the younger dramatist, who had never felt the force of the first wave of national enthusiasm, was naturally most easily influenced by the first beginnings of decline, and we have already

seen how accurately in his most celebrated work he reflected the social conditions of his time. He is the representative, in short, not of the decadence itself, but of the transition to decadence, and herein lies the key to his position: he was the religious admirer of Shakspere and Jonson, yet the intimate associate of Fletcher, bound by strong ties both to the old and to the new. It is certain, that after the first few years of the reign of James I. a decline of the drama did set in, and the years 1611–1613 seem to be a critical point in its history. During these years Shakspere practically retired from the stage, and after them very little of importance was written by Chapman, Dekker, or Webster, * though they all lived many years longer, † while Ben Jonson from this time forward occupied himself mainly in masques. In fact the impulse which had moved the older generation was by that time almost exhausted. This, as we have already seen, came in the form of an enthusiastic patriotism, ennobling human life, so far at least as Englishmen were concerned in it, and producing a united and national interest in the representation of its problems and destiny. But everything had been done by the first Stuart king to cool down patriotism, and to diminish the self-respect and pride of Englishmen; while at the same time by his insolent, hitherto unheard-of divine-right pretensions, he alarmed them for their political liberties, and by his ecclesiastical policy he exasperated theological controversy; thus contriving, both in politics and in religion,

* Except *The Duchess of Malfy*, 1616.

† Chapman died 1634, Dekker 1641, Webster 1652.

to destroy unity and foster party spirit to an extent which had been unknown for nearly half a century. This condition of things was unfavourable to everything national, and above all things to the national drama, which became rather the amusement of the idle, than the embodiment of a popular enthusiasm; and the more so, perhaps, because the sovereign took it under his patronage. The change was marked more especially by the increasing favour of masques and such forms of entertainment as involved pageantry and magnificence, and by the closer relations of the leading dramatists to the court. As the stage became more and more attached to the court, the Puritan opposition became more and more hostile to the stage, the morals of which did not improve by contact with the profligacy of good society; and meanwhile the writers for it were driven to the expedient of sensationalism, in order to attract attention. "In the commencement of a degeneracy in the dramatic art," observes Schlegel, "the spectators first lose the capability of judging of a play as a whole," hence "the harmony of the composition, and the due proportion between all the various parts," is apt to be neglected, and the flagging interest is stimulated by scenes of horror or strange and startling incidents. This tendency is already visible, as we have seen, in the transition period, and to appreciate the tendency it is necessary to cast a glance at its further development.

The chief representatives of the new school are Fletcher, Massinger, and Ford; of whom the first domin-

ated the stage from about 1615 to his death in 1625, and the second carried on the tradition thence almost until the closing of the theatres, while the third occasionally startled audiences at the *Phœnix* or at the *Blackfriars* by a note of deeper tragedy than could be heard in those times from any other author. Several representatives of the older generation were still alive, notably Ben Jonson, but he remained only as a survival of an epoch which had passed away; from 1616 to 1625 he wrote nothing but masques, and when he again ventured on the public stage with an unfortunate *New Inn* or *Magnetic Lady*, he could do little but rail upon the times which failed to appreciate his genius: the new (or middle) comedy of the day was of a very different type from those broad delineations of every variety of English life and character which he had presented in *Bartholomew Fair;* but he could not, like Webster and Dekker, consent to be altogether pushed aside.

The history of the latest development of the romantic drama in England has yet to be written, and that is not the task which the present writer has proposed to himself. Yet it is easy to distinguish the general characteristics of the new race, and they are such as might have been expected from the character of the times. The age of lofty imagination and enthusiastic patriotism has passed away; the age of seriousness and sense of duty has not yet fully established itself. There is room for the drama yet, but it has been shorn in a great degree of its poetical beauty, and deprived altogether of those spontaneously upspringing sources of life which made it

once not the amusement of a court but the passionate interest of a people. The people now are becoming less and less interested in that direction, nay more and more interested in the opposite, in "Players' Scourges," and the like, which prove the unlawfulness for godly persons of all stage diversions whatever, and in pelting the women actors in lewd French plays, which unsuspectingly and perhaps under royal encouragement, Queen Henrietta Maria being theatrically inclined, show themselves sometimes at the London theatres. Accordingly, the stage is becoming, as before said, more and more an entertainment for the court, and for dissolute idlers of the Humphrey Mildmay type, and has more and more lost elevation or betaken itself to illegitimate sources of interest. The first and most obvious result is the growing importance of comedy, not of that romantic and poetical type which was perhaps Shakspere's most original achievement, nor of the farcical kind which had served formerly as interlude and relief to tragic matter, but the comedy of fashionable daily life, in which the gentlemen who sat upon the stage could recognize themselves represented to the life, and in which the morals were those of the court of James I. Let it be without question admitted that "the conversation of gentlemen" was better understood by this generation of dramatists than by the former; and let it be added that Fletcher (with poetry in him too of true quality) was the master of this essentially prosaic invention. Great as are the merits of *The Chances* and *The Wild-Goose Chase*, this is no national comedy; the native humanity is overlaid

with a veneer of fashion, it is already a comedy of manners.

Massinger was not a court poet, and his comedy is of a different type; but the fact that it was in realistic comedy that he achieved his highest excellence indicates again the tendency of the time, the descent from the high cloudland of poetical imagination to the *terra firma* of prosaic fact. Even the tragedy of this age is more and more apt to run to tragicomedy, and the interest in great characters and tragic catastrophes is no longer sufficient of itself, but needs to be helped out from other sources. The tendency to rhetorical declamation already appears in Fletcher's *Bonduca*, and is reproduced in the popular form of religious eloquence for the conversion of the infidel in his *Island Princess*, and in Massinger's *Renegado*. Stage effect began to be studied in the way of pictorial pageantry and grouping,* and the theatres took advantage of the inventions of Inigo Jones, and the introduction of movable scenes. Complaint has been made that this elaboration of scenery was fatal to the

* The concluding scene of Ford's *Broken Heart* affords an illustration which is quite in modern taste. This is the stage directions:—

"Scene, A Temple. An Altar covered with white: two lights of virgin wax upon it. *Recorders*, during which enter *Attendants*, bearing *Ithocles* upon a Hearse, in a rich robe, with a crown on his head; and place him on the one side of the Altar. After which, enter *Calantha* in white, crowned, attended by *Euphranea*, etc., also in white: *Nearchus*, *Armostes*, etc. *Calantha* kneels before the Altar, the *Ladies* kneeling behind her, the rest stand off. The *Recorders* cease during her devotions. Soft Music, *Calantha* and the rest rise, doing obeisance to the Altar."

Yet Ford might safely rely upon other resources, and this very scene is called by Charles Lamb with pardonable exaggeration the most affecting upon the stage.

picturesque and poetical character of the drama itself, but in fact it was the decline of poetry which led to the demand for pageants. Those ten years of Jonson's life during which he devoted himself to masques are deeply significant of the change that had come about since the days when the audience were told to "suppose a Temple" in the absence of any means of representing it; and it is certain that the masques of the day tended to be rather "daubed with cost," than "graced with elegancy."* Further, the interest of a jaded audience has to be roused by startling novelties of incident and plot, surprising catastrophes and unexpected developments of horror by means of incest or murder; the ordinary relation of the sexes is often inverted, great ladies put off all womanly modesty in the wooing of their inferiors, becoming more shameless in the drama of Massinger than they have been heretofore upon the English stage. His Honoria, in *The Picture*, is certainly a marvel of immodesty, a queen and the wife of a devoted husband, who calls upon the ever-shining lamps of heaven and their Maker, as witnesses of the purity of her affection for the man whom she addresses thus:—

> "You have, sir,
> A jewel of such matchless worth and lustre,
> As does disdain comparison, and darkens
> All that is rare in other men; and that
> I must or win or lessen . . . 'tis your loyalty
> And constancy to your wife; 'tis that I dote on,
> And does deserve my envy; and that jewel,
> Or by fair play or foul, I must win from you."

* The cost of the great *Masque of the Inns of Court* in 1634 was £21,000 for a single performance.

Incestuous passions such as those of Malefort or of Giovanni and Annabella; violent and surprising incidents and turns of the plot, as in *The Duke of Milan*, *The Bondman* ("strange meanders" indeed!), or *The Broken Heart*,—to these the dramatist of the later years is driven that he may at least startle the audience whom he cannot carry with him. Not that there is any extravagance of incident or any horror of crime which might not be paralleled from the Elizabethans, but it was not on these that the interest of the older plays depended; those ruder spectators surfeited in true barbarian fashion, but the appetite which they indulged was healthy if coarse; the taste for substantial food plainly dressed is now gone, all dishes must be seasoned to pungency if they are to tickle these more courtier-like palates.

Finally, one at least of our authors had recourse habitually to means of awakening interest which are still less legitimate from an artistic point of view, though liable enough always to appear upon an English stage. It needed not the historical learning of Professor Gardiner to prove that Massinger's plays abound in political references. No reader of them who is in the least acquainted with the history of the times can fail to observe the general fact, though doubtless there are many allusions which only the expert can trace. *The Maid of Honour* is little else than a thinly veiled political satire, and into its reflections upon the peace policy of James and Charles as contrasted with glorious elder time we may read more than a mere political

reference. Unconscious as the writer may have been of this, it is certain that the degenerate condition of his own art was closely connected with that ebbing away of national pride and adventurous patriotism, which the poet of the opposition would attribute doubtless to the character of the sovereign, but which really sprang from causes lying far deeper, from rifts in the national unity showing themselves almost as soon as the common enemy had disappeared, and was only encouraged, not produced, by the pacific temperament of the first Stuart king. Certain it is that the crisis in the history of the stage was also a crisis in the history of the nation. In 1611 James first applied to a foreign power (and that the power of Spain) for help in his difficulties with his own subjects; in 1618 the last great Elizabethan died on the scaffold because he could not conform to the conditions of peaceful and, as it seemed to him, pusillanimous times. If religion had been the root of the drama, it should have flourished in these times the more, and grown more instead of less national; for whatever the court might be, the people were becoming more deeply religious than ever before. The history of the English drama from 1611 to 1642 may serve, when it is written, to illustrate the statement that, so far as this great national product had any single source, it sprang originally from the spirit of united patriotism; and the claim of Francis Beaumont to consideration in such a history would be partly at least the fact that he was more than any other man the link between the earlier and the later generation.

TABLE OF THE PLAYS

IN WHICH BEAUMONT HAD A SHARE, WITH A SUMMARY OF THE DISTRIBUTION PROPOSED IN THE PRECEDING ESSAY, AND THE MOST PROBABLE DATES OF THEIR FIRST PRODUCTION.

FOR convenience an opinion is here expressed about every scene without the qualifications which will be found elsewhere; and while the probability amounts in some cases to practical certainty, in others it is the result of a very doubtful balancing of evidence, upon which strong conviction is unattainable.

The Woman Hater, 1607, by Beaumont alone.

Philaster, 1608, by Beaumont alone.

The Maid's Tragedy, 1609; Act i., ii., iii., iv. 2, v. 4., by Beaumont.
Act iv. 1, v. 1, 2, 3, by Fletcher.

Four Plays in One, date uncertain; the induction and first two Triumphs by Beaumont.
The rest by Fletcher.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle, 1610, by Beaumont alone.

A King and No King, 1611; Act i., ii., iii., iv. 4, v. 2, 4, by Beaumont.
Act iv. 1, 2, 3, v. 1, 3, by Fletcher.

Cupid's Revenge, 1612; Act i. 1 (first part), 3, 4 (first part), ii. 1, 2, 3, 4, iii. 1, 2, iv. 1 (first part), by Beaumont.
Act i. 1 (second part), 2, 4 (second part), ii. 5, 6, iii. 3, 4, iv. 1 (second part), 2, 3, 4, v., by Fletcher.

The Scornful Lady, date uncertain; Act i., ii., iii. 2 (part), v. 2, by Beaumont.
Act iii. 1, 2 (part), iv., v. 1, 3, 4, by Fletcher.

The Coxcomb, 1612; Act i. 4, 6, ii. 4, iii. 3, v. 2, by Beaumont.
Act i. 1, 2, 3, 5, ii. 1, 2, 3, iii. 1, 2, iv., v. 1, 3, by Fletcher.
Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn, 1613, by Beaumont alone.
The Captain, 1613; Act i. 2, ii. 2, iv. 5, v. 4, 5, possibly by Beaumont.
Act i. 1, 3, ii. 1, iii., iv. 1, 2, 3, 4, v. 1, 2, 3, by Fletcher.
Thierry and Theodoret, date uncertain; Act i. 2, ii. 1, iii., v. 1, by Beaumont.
Act i. 1, ii. 2, 3, 4, iv., v. 2, by Fletcher.
Wit at Several Weapons, date uncertain; Act i. 2, ii. 2, 3, 4, iv. 1, v., by Beaumont.
Act i. 1, ii. 1, iii., iv. 2, 3, by Fletcher.
The Knight of Malta, date uncertain; Act i., v., by Beaumont.
Act ii., iii., iv., by Fletcher.

The gradually increasing importance of the share taken by Fletcher, so far at least as the order of succession is fixed, deserves remark.

APPENDIX.

ON THE AUTHORSHIP OF "SALMACIS AND HERMAPHRODITUS."

It is of some little importance to determine the question whether the poem of *Salmacis* * *and Hermaphroditus* is rightly attributed to Beaumont or no; for it is so entirely different in character from his other works, that our estimate of his mental tendencies must be affected by acceptance or rejection of this otherwise rather unimportant poem. The internal evidence is clearly against it; and the external may be briefly stated thus: The poem, published anonymously in 1602, appears to have been first ascribed to Beaumont by the bookseller Lawrence Blaikelocke, no very reputable person if Wood may be believed, who in 1640 published in a book which he called *Poems by Francis Beaumont, Gent.* this piece and the *Remedie of Love*, with Beaumont's *Elegy on Lady Markham*, Earle's commendatory verses on Beaumont, and several miscellaneous poems, of which four at least have been identified as the work of other authors, and the rest are doubtful. The poem of *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* is preceded by several copies of verses addressed to the author, one of which has in this edition the signature "J. F." (suggesting John Fletcher),† and also by an

* So it is written in the first edition, not *Salmasis* as given by Collier, and after him by Dyce.

† Seward's note on this copy of verses is singularly unhappy, and may serve as a specimen of eighteenth century editing. "That Beaumont wrote

invocation to Calliope, signed in this edition "F. B." But in the edition of 1602, the signature of the first is "A. F.," and that of the second is altogether wanting.* This collection was re-

something in the Ovidian *manner* seems evident from these lines; but the *Hermaphrodite*, which is printed as his and supposed to be the thing referred to in this ode, is claimed by Cleveland as a conjunct performance between himself and Randolph." Now first we may remark that "this ode" can refer to nothing except the poem of *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* to which it is prefixed; secondly, that poem was printed (with these lines prefixed) in the year 1602, while Randolph was born in 1605, and Cleveland in 1613; thirdly, Cleveland, who did long afterwards write some very trivial verses *Upon a Hermaphrodite*, does *not* claim even these "as a conjunct performance," but expressly says that they were written after Randolph's death. The stupidity which confused *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* with Cleveland's poem is only matched by the carelessness with which Cleveland is cited as authority for the statement which he took pains to deny. The main source of Seward's error will be seen presently.

* J. P. Collier's *Bibliographical Account of the Rarest Books in the English Language*, vol. i. pp. 60–62. The statement of Collier about the signatures has been kindly verified for me by Mr. E. B. Nicholson, Librarian of the Bodleian Library, which possesses one of the two copies known to exist of the edition of 1602. By his courtesy I am able also to supply a correction in the copy of verses "To the Authour" referred to above. The first line of this, which in all other editions, including Dyce's, is given—

"The matchless lust of a fair poesy,"

is in the Bodleian copy—

"The matchlesse lustre of faire poesie,"—

obviously the true reading.

It may be observed also that in the last line of the last introductory poem the reading of the Oxford copy is "halfe-mayd." In all other editions (including Dyce's) it is "half-mad," a ridiculous alteration which just destroys the point of the lines. Collier has here supplied the correction though not careful to preserve the original spelling, which in the case of a disputed reading might have been important.

Dyce states that he never saw a copy of the edition of 1602. Remembering the many emendations which he has made in the plays by reference to the authority of early quartos, one is inclined to ask why this was neglected.

published in 1653 * with additions, many of which can be attributed to other authors, as John Beaumont, Ben Jonson, Fletcher, Randolph, Carew, Shirley, Cleveland, Waller, and Harington, besides others which cannot be so definitely assigned, but are certainly not by the author to whom they are here ascribed—as for example the epitaph on Ben Jonson, who died more than twenty years later than Beaumont. There were also a few genuine additions; the folio of 1647 supplied the publisher with Beaumont's *Masque* and his letter to Ben Jonson, as well as Fletcher's verses on *An Honest Man's Fortune;* and a considerable part of the additional matter is a miscellaneous collection of prologues, epilogues and songs, chiefly from the plays of Fletcher. Evidently there is thrown in everything on which the publisher could lay hands which seemed to have even the remotest connection with Beaumont, including Shirley's epitaph on Charles Beaumont, Basse's epitaph on Shakspere, and, strange to say, the verses *Upon a Hermaphrodite* by Cleveland, ascribed here to Randolph † and inserted apparently because of its partial similarity of title with the poem ascribed to Beaumont.‡

This miscellany was re-issued in 1660, with merely a new titlepage, upon which it is called *The Golden Remains of those so much admired dramatick poets Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher.*

* It does not seem to have been noticed that there are two editions of this book dated 1653. They are from the same types, but one has "William Hope" on the titlepage instead of "L. B.," and is rather more correctly printed.

† Cleveland's claim to the sole authorship of them is printed immediately after.

‡ The lines *On the Tombs in Westminster Abbey*, published in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, and there attributed to Beaumont, were among the additions made in 1653. There is no external evidence of authorship except their appearance in Blaikelocke's collection; judging by internal evidence we might perhaps be disposed to think them genuine.

On the whole there seems to be absolutely no reason to trust the publisher's assertion as regards the authorship of any poem in any one of these volumes. He seems simply to have been bent upon making a book with an attractive name upon the titlepage, and to have swept into it everything which he could safely appropriate, not hesitating to tamper with signatures, that his case might be made more plausible. To conjecture that *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* may have been by some other member of the Beaumont family, several of whom were verse writers and have been confused with the dramatist, is quite superfluous. Enough for Blaikelocke that the poem was anonymous and unlikely to be claimed by a living author.

One addition to this evidence, of a rather doubtful kind, is supplied by Dyce. A poem called *The Metamorphosis of Tobacco*, also printed anonymously in 1602, has been ascribed to John Beaumont.* To this is prefixed a few commendatory verses signed F. B., which *may* have been written by his brother Francis. The author of these speaks of himself as a hitherto quite untried writer, intimates in fact that this is his first attempt at verse-making :—

"My new-borne Muse assaies her tender wing," etc.

The author of these lines could hardly have been one who either had already published or was just about to publish so considerable a poem as *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*.

* Mr. Grosart, who has admitted it into his edition of Sir John Beaumont's poems, thinks it unquestionably his. To the present writer the evidence seems less convincing.

THE END.

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